

GOOD-BYE TO AN OLD FRIEND

BY LISA ROWE



I am sad to tell you that Winifred, better known as Winnie, the Centers' educational woodchuck, passed away on August 25, 2008. In early March what appeared to be a sore was discovered in Winnie's right armpit. When treatment for this wound didn't heal it, our volunteer veterinarians felt it required further investigation. On April 14th the test results revealed Winnie had squamous cell carcinoma, a fast growing and aggressive cancer.

Our veterinarians did research into treatment options – there isn't a great deal of literature on cancer in woodchucks. Any chemotherapy or radiation would be experimental, would have serious side effects and limited results. Our vets, in consultation with our staff, decided to not use such drastic treatments. We discussed quality of life issues and our volunteers were notified that goodbyes should be said soon. The day she left her beloved peas in her bowl uneaten, we knew the end was nearing.

Winnie came to the Center in fall of 2002 with head trauma we suspect was from a vehicle accident. Her front teeth had been broken off, and over that following winter, grew back in crooked despite our best efforts to prevent it. While a crooked grin may be only a cosmetic problem for

people, it is a serious problem for rodents. Rodent incisor teeth grow constantly and the two upper and two lower teeth must be in alignment so they wear down evenly.

Otherwise the teeth will continue to grow out of the mouth, and even up through the skull. The rodent will starve because it cannot eat properly. Winnie's head trauma had also left her more docile than usual. It was determined that she was not releasable back to the wild. We looked for educational placement for her and a nature center was going to take her until they decided they were not up to the task of trimming her teeth regularly. After nearly a year, our staff and volunteers had fallen in love with the plump gal and decided to add her to our educational staff.

The number of people Winnie taught about woodchucks over the years is enormous.



Winter 2008



Woodchucks have an undeserved bad reputation. Some people didn't know a groundhog and a woodchuck were the same animal and many people were surprised to learn that Winnie was a woodchuck. People were amused at how gentle and charming she was. As an ambassador for her species she educated many people about woodchuck natural history. Coming to know an individual helps to personalize the whole species. In her time as an ambassador, Winnie visited schools, scout groups, garden and birding clubs, senior centers, church groups, 4-H groups, humane societies, WINC fundraising events – Winnie went everywhere. She even went to church several times for the blessing of the animals on St. Francis of Assisi Saint Day where barking dogs never phased her. Groundhog Day of 2008 was her crowning glory when she was the official groundhog for the Milwaukee Groundhog Club.

Christmas 2006



Everywhere she went people were pleasantly surprised to meet her and she opened the door to many conversations about co-existing peacefully with wildlife. Winnie dug a big burrow in our hearts that will never be filled again. Winnie's ashes will accompany us to the new Center where we will create a lasting memorial to this special friend who touched so many people in her lifetime. She will be remembered forever through the Winnie Memorial Fund which has been set up to provide funds for future medical care for our hard-working educational animals. If you would like more information about the fund, our educational programs, or making a donation, contact the Center at 262-968-5075 seven days a week or visit our website at www.helpingwildlife.org

Groundhog Day
2008

