



Flight Plan Rehab



2024

We're Back!

After a brief recess from wildlife work, we migrated to our new homestead over the first few days of May. News traveled fast!

On May 14, well before we'd finished unpacking our personal belongings, the first birds of our 2024 season were admitted.

What's Different?

Some things haven't changed – we're still Diane Winn and Marc Payne! But our new endeavor, **Flight Plan Rehab**, is a modest, mostly seasonal practice that specializes in small songbirds. Its name was inspired by the title of a book by Maryjo Koch, given to us back in 2010 and revisited many times since.



Flight Plan's specialty reflects Diane's 25-year passion for and experience with aerial insectivores, like Chimney Swifts, all of the swallow species, and flycatchers like phoebes and kingbirds. Accordingly, of the 113 birds cared for in 2024, the most frequently admitted were Swallows (30 in all, comprising Barn, Tree and Cliff species), Eastern Phoebes (29), and Chimney Swifts (28). Most of them were orphaned.

True, we have new lodgings, but we are delighted to remain in Freedom, where we've made many friends over the years. At a 2022 neighborhood gathering, we'd learned of a nearby piece of land whose owners had no particular plans for it. We fell in love at first sight of its woods-and-wetland landscape, and it was ours a few months later.



Although "flight" is not a term normally associated with reptiles and amphibians, a more general definition of the word allows wiggle room to take advantage of Marc's 40+ years of herptile knowhow. In 2024, 16 turtles crossed our threshold, most of them car-hit Eastern Painted Turtles.

Whether due to cosmic kindness or just luck, a top-notch construction team, Halldale Builders, was available to make our homestead a reality. Along the way, Glenn and his crew shifted priorities as needed to ensure that space was ready for avian occupants.

The only other necessary piece of the puzzle was a new set of state and federal rehabilitation permits, and in due course, they were issued!

Funding and Spending

For several reasons, including Flight Plan Rehab's limited size and scope, we decided not to incorporate and form a 501(c)(3). In a return to our mom-and-pop-shop roots, we opted to keep things simple and operate as a sole proprietor. Flight Plan has its own checking account and can accept gifts, but they are not tax-deductible.

In making this decision, it was understood that we would be responsible for most of the funding. We accepted that responsibility in part by depositing a "nest egg" in Flight Plan's checking account to be used as needed, whether in 2024 or in any lean year ahead.

As shown below, our contributions were augmented by gifts from other individuals and by the foundation grant noted on p. 2.

FUNDING 2024

\$21,393	Diane & Marc
\$10,450	Other Contributors
\$ 1,600	Foundation Grant
\$33,443	Total

As to how those funds were used, the largest expenditure was the Flight Cage, followed by Equipment (brooder and new microscope) and Business Costs (Flight Plan's permit fee, phone bills, insurance premiums, etc.).

Other operating expenses comprised Foods, Medical Supplies, and Fixtures (mesh habitats, artificial plants, heating pads, etc.).

SPENDING 2024

\$8,639	Flight Cage
\$1,534	Equipment
\$1,385	Business Expenses
\$1,370	Foods, Fixtures, & Medical Supplies
\$12,928	Total

On 6/26, we admitted a nestling Great Crested Flycatcher found on a rock along a walking trail in Brunswick. The young bird was cold and basically comatose; we postponed an exam to get him into a warm nest, snuggled into a clutch of similar-age Eastern Phoebes. Diane delivered fluids and then some dilute food; a few hours later, she heard the bird's distinctive begging call.

He spent most of the first day asleep, but soon rallied in the company of his phoebe cousins, who readily accepted their new clutch-mate.



As the young flycatcher matured, we sought reports of others of his species, and asked his rescuer to monitor the trail area for sights or sounds of his family. These efforts failed. We had been releasing hand-raised phoebes here on the property, which hosts several wild phoebe families, so we decided to let the flycatcher go here, along with his adoptive siblings.

Release day was 7/14. For three days after that, we sometimes heard him calling, but always from a distance; he did not approach any of us for handouts. But on the 4th day, while taking a break from construction, Terry heard the calls of two Great Cresteds! Looking up, he saw one bird perching on a branch, a second bird flying over to join it, and then the two of them flying deeper into the woods, side by side.

We could readily envision a mature bird passing through on migration and stopping by to check out the call of our fledgling. In our imagination, they joined forces, and then traveled ever southward together.

New Facilities!

The initial/critical care bird room was ready within a few days of our arrival. Its centerpiece is a new RCOM Bird Brooder purchased with a grant from the Sean Mahoney Memorial Foundation.



Mesh habitats warmed with heating pads are the next step for young birds that no longer need the heat of the brooder.



The first orphaned Chimney Swifts of the summer, referred to us by our friend and colleague Kappy Sprenger, arrived about 7 p.m. on 7/7. Typical of nestling swifts, they were clumsy at first, but soon learned to orient toward and accept the feeding syringe. In a closer look at a bird that was not begging with characteristic enthusiasm, we found a leg fracture just above the foot, a likely impact injury incurred in the fall from the nest site. The good news was that all the toes worked, and the fracture was easy to splint (that's what we are doing in the photo on p. 1) with the shaft of a feather molted by our cockatoo. We started the young swift on a medicinal remedy for painful traumatic injuries, and within a couple of days, he was eating normally. When the splint was removed on 7/17, he had full use of the leg. As more young swifts were admitted over the next two weeks, three more similar leg fractures were mended successfully.

As swift populations have declined, wild flocks have been increasingly difficult to find. With previous staging roosts in Freedom, Belfast, and Unity no longer being used, our best release site over the past few years has been Rockland, where swifts are still reliably seen in evening social flights as migration gets underway in August. Our hand-reared swifts joined wild counterparts overhead on 8/6, 8/11, and 8/28.

We thank Rockland-area swift scouts Kate Doiron and Eddy Edwards for joining us again in 2024!

A sunroom on the west side of our house serves as an aviary that can be used year round. With windows on 3 sides, full-spectrum lighting, and an assortment of shrubs and plants, it's the next best thing to outdoors.



Our first clutch of Eastern Phoebes moved in on 6/16, and were soon joined by fledgling Barn Swallows.



Later in the season, a young Red-eyed Vireo joined the group, but was not inclined to socialize.



Terry began building our outdoor octagonal flight cage early in July. . .



. . . and Chimney Swifts spread their wings there as soon as the interior was ready for them.



Finishing touches on the exterior were postponed until September, when the cage was empty.



The last bird admitted in 2024 was a juvenile male Ruby-throated Hummingbird that had visited a feeder in Norway over the first week in November. Overnight temperatures were below freezing, and the hummer seemed to have no other food source, as he stayed in a small tree close to the feeder. As days passed and the bird did not leave, the homeowners became increasingly worried, and readily agreed to a visit from our friend and volunteer Deb. It was not difficult to capture the bird.



The young hummer was underweight and weak. He stayed in a mesh habitat for the first week, while he recovered strength with proper nutrition and warmth, and while the sunroom was retrofitted to become his winter quarters.

Although a complete liquid food was provided, we wanted the hummer to have fruit flies for enrichment as well as nutrition. But neither we nor friends who composted kitchen waste had any remaining so long after summer. Finally, we bought a colony of wingless fruit flies marketed for reptiles; in the wild, hummingbirds do glean some insects, and our winter guest readily adapted to prey that crawled rather than flew. Having settled in contentedly for the remainder of the cold weather ahead, he'll be released as soon as his friends return to Maine in the spring.

It Took a Village . . . but in our neighborhood, we especially appreciated Terry Heitz for carpentry and construction, Deb Huard for photography and transportation, and Sue Stone for associate bird care and moral support. Flight Plan's veterinarian, Dr. Karin Tichy (Atlantic Veterinary Care in Damariscotta) has been a valuable asset to our endeavors.

In addition to these friends and others mentioned elsewhere, many folks comprised the community that helped Flight Plan Rehab fledge in 2024 by giving encouragement and advice, contributing funds and supplies, hosting releases, rescuing and transporting, lending administrative assistance, and just being there in occasional dark moments. Only a few of these wonderful people are acknowledged below – the rest of you know who you are!

Bob Cordes (MDIFW)
Amy Dillon
Dan Foss (Maine Wildlife Transport)
Don Fournier
Kshanti Greene
Diane Jones & Friends
Keel Kemper (MDIFW)

Selkie O'Mira
Elmyra Reynolds
Ann Rivers and Tony Mullane (Acadia Wildlife Center)
Barbara Skapa
Kappy Sprenger
Julie Vaillancourt

Looking Ahead

We don't anticipate another flight cage, but do plan to enhance our reptile accommodations. A 750-gallon pool given to us by Dale Doucette was used for turtles in 2024, and thanks to a generous financial gift late in the calendar year, an outbuilding to host it is planned for the coming summer.

After keeping a low social media profile in 2024, we will launch a website and Facebook page in the spring of '25!

Stay Tuned!





On July 15, two tiny hatchlings were rescued from the ground at a landscaping site in Rockland. That evening, the rescuer's fiancé, Tiffany, texted photos and exchanged messages with Diane regarding how best to keep them alive overnight, with warmth the biggest challenge. Our friends Tug and Georgia rearranged plans for the following morning in order to fetch the birds here from Tiffany's workplace in Rockport. They were cold and lethargic on arrival, but the brooder had been pre-heated to 98°, and the tiny birds seemed to revive a bit after they'd warmed up. They were 2-day-old Eastern Phoebes.

Diane drew on lessons learned over 20+ years of past experience with egglet (newly-hatched) songbirds, including a nutritional protocol of special foods plus probiotics and digestive enzymes. But overcoming the effects of chilling in the first day of a bird's life can be almost impossible, and despite heroic efforts, the smaller of the two birds failed to thrive, and died on the 10th day. By contrast, the larger bird had matured normally, and after her sibling had passed away, settled into a clutch of nestling Cliff Swallows for company on 7/27. She fledged on 8/2, by which time she was indistinguishable from other phoebes that had been admitted as nestlings. She was released on 8/11.

Final Notes

Difficulties faced by wild birds are widely known, especially given recent media accounts of losses due to avian influenza. Not all species are equally affected; so far, the disease has not been shown to adversely affect most songbirds, but they were already in trouble for other reasons, including habitat loss and the decline of insect populations. Here in Maine, Bank Swallows and Cliff Swallows are listed as Threatened, while Chimney Swifts, Barn Swallows, and Tree Swallows are listed as Species of Special Concern.

As already noted, Flight Plan Rehab specializes in these kinds of birds plus Eastern Phoebes and other flycatchers. In 2024, our release rate for swifts, swallows, and flycatchers, including injured adults as well as orphaned youngsters, was approximately 80%. This outcome is owed to our ability to focus on a limited number of species with which we have many years of intensive experience that included the development of nutritionally complete insect-based diets. We gladly refer other kinds of birds to rehab colleagues better equipped to handle them, and continue to also work cooperatively with MDIFW's Biologists, Game Wardens, and Wildlife Conflict Agents.

Flight Plan's mission includes not only providing expert care at our facility, but also teaching, mentoring, and fine-tuning protocols that can be passed to the next generation of wild bird caregivers by the time we are ready to retire. We look forward to your company on the journey ahead!

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Diane & Marc
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