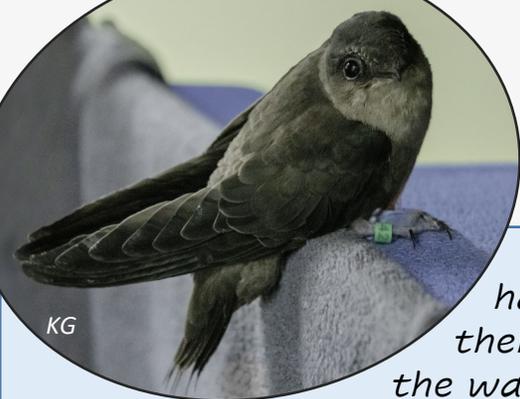


Flight Plan Rehab 2025



The path traveled in our first full year of operation had some unexpected twists and turns, but all of them led to productive outcomes! Companions along the way included both old and new friends collaborating to ensure the best possible care for birds and turtles in need of assistance. A few highlights from the year are shared in these pages!

2025 Convalescents

A total of 195 birds received care in 2025, more than half of them comprising the aerial insectivore species in which Flight Plan specializes – swifts, swallows, and flycatchers. While the aerial insectivore guild is characterized by a primary foraging strategy of capturing insects in flight, songbirds in other insectivorous groups pluck their prey from substrates such as vegetation or the ground. We had a sampling of those groups as well, including wrens, vireos, and warblers. Flight Plan also takes hummingbirds, which consume floral nectar for energy but hunt insects to obtain protein and other important nutrients lacking in nectar.



In addition to birds, we cared for 24 turtles, 20 of which were Painted Turtles. Our new facility for reptiles was featured in our [July 2025 Gazette](#). Some turtle patients in 2025 were shared with [Maine Wildlife Rehabilitation](#).

On June 13, our Admissions Coordinator, Deb, delivered a nestling that had been found on the ground in Leeds. Over the next few days, we tried several kinds of nests, but the bird didn't seem comfortable until Diane created a cavity by turning a large crocheted nest on its side. By then, tell-tale stripes on the bird's head were starting to appear and reveal the newcomer to be an Ovenbird, a warbler that gets its common name from dome-shaped nests constructed on the ground.



Once the bird was out and about in the Sunroom, he stayed on the floor except to solicit hand feeding, and that behavior was still the norm a month later. Persistent begging made sense in the context of natural history. Ovenbirds fledge on foot rather than by flight from the nest, and remain semi-dependent on their parents for 5-6 weeks. To mimic a woods environment, we placed a large shallow bin filled with leaf and other ground litter on the floor of the sunroom, stocking it with live mealworms and other insects. The young Ovenbird became increasingly intent on scavenging there, and by the time the bin and the bird were moved out to the Flight Cage in late July, he was completely self feeding.

Having heard many an Ovenbird calling on the property, we knew it was prime real estate for the species. Although adults depart the breeding ground once their young can fend for themselves, immatures remain well into fall. We released our fledgling on August 2, confident that he would find other teenagers, hone his foraging skills, and achieve flight strength well before it was time to migrate. We opened the mesh in which he'd been carried into the woods on the ground, expecting him to take a cautious stroll into the underbrush. Instead, he flew straight up, took a long, high circle over the brook, and disappeared into the woods.



The Wind Beneath Their Wings

Sue Stone (Associate Caregiver) and Deb Huard (Admissions Coordinator) served alongside us at the forefront of this endeavor, but many others were part of a multi-faceted support team for our patients, providing advice and encouragement, graphics and photographs, supplies and funds, rescues and transports, and/or shoulders to cry on. In addition to Sue and Deb, we are especially grateful to Flight Plan's awesome veterinarian, Dr. Karin Tichy ([Atlantic Veterinary Care](#)), plus. . .



On July 12, we admitted a nestling wren that had been found on the ground in Oxford, Maine. The rescuer had been told that the bird was a phoebe, but it was a wren, though not the more familiar House Wren. Given its relatively small size, short, tilted tail, and dark feathering, it pretty much had to be a Winter Wren. There was a puzzling inconsistency, though. The rescuer had found the bird in an open sandy area, but Winter Wrens breed in forests, and there were no wounds to suggest that a predator may have taken the bird from its natal habitat. That mystery was never to be solved.

We tentatively placed the newcomer with two nestling House Wrens that had arrived a few days earlier. Their nest had been found on a boat that was moved from an unknown location, with four already dead when the nest was discovered and brought to our colleague Kappy Sprenger, who stabilized and transferred them here. The House Wrens were doing fine, already displaying the activity level characteristic of the species. They



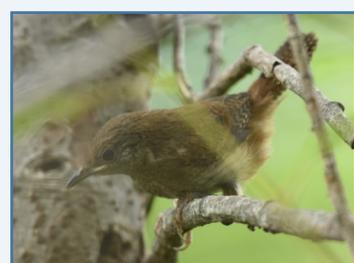
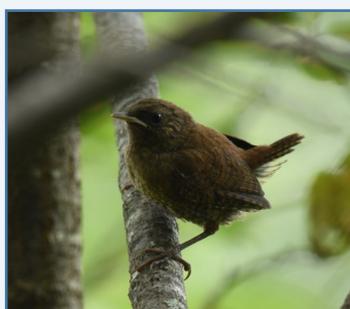
were not interested in the smaller stranger, who seemed exhausted and terrified. Warmth, quiet, and contact comfort were provided in a nest with an egglet American Robin. Although the wren was more mature than the robin, each benefited from the other's company.



The two of them remained together for several days, and when the little wren seemed ready for an upgrade, she joined two House Wrens. Then on the 18th, the mesh enclosure containing the three wrens was moved into the 4' tent described in our [July Gazette](#) as a habitat for young House Wrens earlier in the season. As soon as we unzipped the mesh the next day, all three wrens disappeared into the hemlock boughs festooning the tent. At first, the Winter Wren was more reticent than the House Wrens, but within a few more days, none of them were begging.



Now the question was whether to split them up or release them together! After breeding season ends, both species occupy similar habitats, and after all, they had grown up together. MDIFW's Songbird Biologist approved releasing them together in the location where we had released House Wrens a few weeks earlier, and the three began their wild lives on July 27.



Release Photos LSL

Avery Berkowitz, DVM
Jan Braumuller
Amy & Bob Campbell
Susan & George Craig
Victor Detmer
Kshanti Greene
Terry Heitz
Keel Kemper (MDIFW)
Carmine Leo
Liberty Graphics
Pam Meier
Katherine Millard
Elmyra Reynolds
Kenzie Roeder (MDIFW)
Barbara Skapa
Kappy Sprenger
Laura Suomi-Lecker
Julie Vaillencourt
Donna & Bill Wade
Kristen & Dick Winn
Tanna & Steve Witkin

On June 11, we responded to a call from a construction company working in Castine. An addition to the original home had been framed, and before it had been closed in, Eastern Phoebes had built a nest in the unfinished interior. But on that day, windows were being installed, leaving no way for the parents to get in and out. At one earlier point, workers had seen five phoebe eggs plus a cowbird egg in the nest, but now the nest contained only three phoebe nestlings, one of which was dead, having been crushed by the much larger cowbird nestling. Marc brought the living two phoebes and the cowbird back here.



The Brown-headed Cowbird is a brood parasite, meaning that females lay their eggs in the nests of other species. Adults of the host species incubate and brood the interloper, often to the detriment of their own young, due to the larger cowbird's aggressive competition for food. There are more than 200 documented host species, with Eastern Phoebe one of the most common ones.

The two phoebes arrived in rough shape; they went into one of our brooders, while the older cowbird was housed separately. Sadly, the smaller of the phoebes died shortly after arriving, and it was touch-and-go with the survivor over the following week. We had other nestling phoebes, but none of them seemed to be good companions for this little one. Then on June 21, we admitted a nestling phoebe that had been seen on the ground being attacked by another bird, with other nestlings dead nearby. This scenario is also not uncommon among Eastern Phoebe families. If the male dies and a replacement mate is accepted by the female, the new male will evict or even kill her nestlings, then start a new family with her. The surviving nestling had head wounds, presumably the result of being pecked by an adult male. An attempt to foster this bird into a somewhat older clutch here failed – the other birds were too rowdy. But the little phoebe who'd survived cowbird parasitism turned out to be the perfect companion!

Later that day, their story took an unexpected turn when we admitted three nestling Barn Swallows from Winslow. Their rescuer, Crystal, had originally found one bird on the ground; she'd climbed a ladder to return it to the nest, then found it on the ground again, so she brought it here. But when she returned home, two more were on the ground, with two in the nest. Her brother watched an adult swallow approaching the nest but being driven off by another swallow, which then proceeded to toss one of the nestlings onto the ground, roughly a 10-foot drop. Crystal secured the three that were on the ground, climbed up and retrieved the one remaining bird from the nest, then drove back here with all four. Two of them were dead on arrival, and of the three that had been alive on admission that day, two died within 24 hours. Necropsies on the dead swallows all had the same results – peck wounds on the head and internal hemorrhaging, presumably from impact. The surviving bird was most likely the one that Crystal had retrieved from the nest rather than from the ground.

Although rare but not unheard of in this species, an unmated Barn Swallow may kill the offspring of a nesting pair, presumably in order to disrupt the parental bond and gain an opportunity to mate with the remaining adult.

You can probably guess what happened to the survivor of this group! We had no other swallows of similar age here at the time, so the young swallow joined the two phoebes described above. Naturally, we began to call their group the "Survivors' Club."

Over the time they were in care here, other birds were integrated into their habitat, including other phoebes as well as other swallows. Eventually, they all went their separate ways. On July 5, the Barn Swallow returned to Crystal's barn, where other swallows remained, and on the same day, the second phoebe was released here, along with others that had since joined the company. The Castine phoebe took longer to finish growing up, but was released on July 15.

The cowbird had also survived, and was released on June 30.



The Foreseeable Future



We'd been certain that just one outdoor flight cage would be sufficient for our needs! But as our species inventory expanded in 2025, friends particularly fond of chickadees convinced us that small generalist insectivores really ought to have their own flight cage, rather than cohabitate with flycatchers and other obligate insectivores. Accordingly, this past fall, we staked out a site and placed an order for an Amish-built songbird habitat. It will be delivered in the spring, in plenty of time for baby season.

In addition to specialist caregiving, our plans for 2026 include teaching, mentoring, and fine-tuning protocols for egglet (newly-hatched) songbirds of any species, plus publishing updates of Diane's copyrighted hand-rearing formulas.

One of our spring hummingbird admissions had gotten herself into serious difficulty! First thing in the morning of May 13, she was found dangling by her beak, which was stuck to a piece of vapor barrier tape that had peeled from an edge of ceiling insulation in a car shop in Cushing. The shop's large doors had been left open the previous day; in retrospect, the hummer must have flown into the building and remained there when it was closed up at the end of the work day. Her rescuer climbed to the peak of the building to cut the adhesive, then placed the bird in a box, opting to leave the task of removing the tape from the beak to us. On that particular day, we had an appointment at Damariscotta Chiropractic Health Center, so in order to expedite transportation, arrangements were made for a volunteer to bring the boxed bird to that office.

When we opened the box, we found the hummer fluffed up and barely moving, with her beak completely encased in a curled piece of adhesive. We needed to free the beak asap; fortunately the waiting room was empty and available to serve as an impromptu admissions area. Office Manager Laura produced some small, sharp scissors, which Marc used to cut the tape, with Dr. Sue assisting and Diane holding the bird. While that work was in progress, Laura made a sugar solution and drew it up in a dropper. As soon as the bird's beak was free, Diane offered her a few drops of the sugar water, which she drank. On the return trip, we stopped several times to feed her, and by the time we were halfway there, she was challenging the small mesh travel container.

As it turned out, the Sunroom was already set up for a hummingbird, as the one we'd overwintered (story told in our [2024 Retrospective](#)) had been released earlier that day! To make sure she rested and ate well, the Cushing bird stayed in a large mesh habitat until the next day. By then, she was extremely active, and ready for release! For several reasons, we decided not to take her back to the rescue location. Hummingbird migration was in full swing – there was no way of knowing where she might have been headed when she stopped over in Cushing, and of course we also did not want to risk another encounter with the vapor barrier tape. Another consideration was the stress of confinement for a car trip – this brave lady had had enough already with spaces smaller than the great outdoors! So with confidence that she would find her way to wherever she wanted to go, we opened a window, and with no hesitation, out she flew!



Photos by
Dr. Susan Giglia

Funding and Spending

As noted on the [Funding](#) page of our website, although it has a charitable mission, Flight Plan Rehab is a sole proprietorship, rather than a nonprofit corporation. Flight Plan has checking, PayPal, and Venmo accounts through which gifts may be given in support of its mission, but they are not tax-deductible. At the beginning of 2024, Diane and Marc opened Flight Plan's checking account with a nest egg that was later augmented by other supporters. Our spending total last year was nearly matched by that supplementary funding, leaving most of our original gift in reserve.

As shown below, some funds given in 2025 were dedicated to the new flight cage planned for next year. Our major expense in 2025 was the Greenhouse, which had been largely funded by one of the gifts in 2024. Business costs included insurance, website development, gas/travel, phone bills, professional memberships, etc.

Since our beginning in 2024, start-up expenses (outbuildings, equipment, website, etc.) have comprised significant portions of our annual spending, while operating costs have remained modest. There are no payroll or other outlays for compensation.

FUNDING 2025

\$14,801 Given to be used as needed
\$ 4,500 Dedicated to 2026 Flight Cage
\$19,301 Total

SPENDING 2025

\$6,466 Greenhouse (Herp Center)
\$3,713 Business Expenses
\$2,290 Food, Fixtures, Medical Supplies
\$1,289 Equipment
\$ 500 Deposit for 2026 Flight Cage
\$14,258 Total



On November 24, well after the last of our regulars had departed, Marc called to say he had rescued a female Baltimore Oriole from a road in Rockland. Orioles were a little outside our usual client base, but insects do comprise a significant portion of their diet. We had no other birds at the moment, so co-habitation with other species would not be an issue. Diane told Marc to go ahead and bring her here!

She was lethargic, but our exam revealed no injuries, and she was in good body condition. Two days later, she passed a flight test in the outdoor cage. It was late in the fall for an oriole to be in Maine, but weather was unseasonably warm, and upon checking eBird, we found several very recent reports of an oriole in a Saco neighborhood. On the 28th, Marc drove along a back road near that location, found a group of heavily-laden fruit trees, and released the bird there. Temperatures were in the 40s during the day and mostly above freezing overnight, with no snow on the ground. An occasional oriole was posted on eBird through the remainder of the month, in Saco as well as in nearby towns, so our bird was not the only one lingering. We assumed they'd all be on their way south soon!

But on December 4, Diane received an email from a friend named Karen, who wrote that a female oriole had been seen in her yard in Warren for about two weeks. Given other orioles posted on eBird as of that day, Diane advised against intervening, but temperatures took a sharp turn toward winter over the next couple of days. On the evening of December 6, Karen easily plucked the fluffed-up, shivering bird from a branch near the feeding station. Upon arrival here, she was thin but uninjured. We confined her to a mesh habitat for a few days to make sure she was eating well, then let her out into the Sunroom.

We were surprised (and slightly horrified!) to see an occasional Maine oriole posted on eBird through much of December, but saw no such reports after the end of that month. As of the date of this narrative, the Warren bird has gained weight and strength, and seems to have settled in for the winter. Come spring, we'll return her to Karen's yard.





Altogether, 41 Chimney Swifts received care here in 2025, with more than half of them referred or transferred here by other rehabilitators. All but two of the total were youngsters orphaned by nest loss.

Swift nests are made of small twigs bonded together and affixed to the chimney wall by the adults' sticky saliva. The nest may not adhere securely to a wall soiled with soot and creosote, however, and as the growing nestlings become heavier, the nest may separate from the chimney wall and fall to the bottom of the chimney along with its occupants. Depending on the nestlings' age and how far they have fallen, internal, neurologic, or orthopedic injuries may be caused by impact.

We admitted young swifts from 13 nests, sometimes a full clutch of five, sometimes a fewer number of survivors. Of the total number of cases, 35 (85%) were released, with six birds lost due mostly to internal or head injuries, but in at least one case, attributable to improper care by the rescuer. We successfully repaired leg fractures of two nestlings.



One of the two adults succumbed to internal injuries of unknown origin. The other adult, originally reported to be a Barn Swallow, had been found on July 30 caught up in the chain of a light fixture in a home undergoing interior renovation. A member of the working crew had untangled the bird, which promptly flew into a window and tumbled to the ground, seemingly unable to fly. Deb provided transportation from Cumberland, but on admission, flight was found to be unimpaired. The workers did not know how the swift had gotten into the house or whether there was a nest in the chimney of the home, but because it was prime breeding season, we decided to release the bird the next day. Marc drove the swift back to Cumberland and the bird flew beautifully upon release! We had imagined a reunion with the swift's mate, but he or she was joined in the sky by two other adults! There was no sign of aggression, and the threesome flew away together for as far as Marc could see them. No photos were taken of these birds aloft, but images of skyward swifts can still be viewed in our [September Gazette!](#)

"We are showered every day with gifts, but they are not meant for us to keep. ... Our work and our joy is to pass along the gift and to trust that what we put out into the universe will always come back."

Robin Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

Closing Comments

In 2025, we continued to specialize in small insectivorous songbirds like swifts, swallows, flycatchers, etc., including some species on Maine's [Special Concern](#) and [Endangered/Threatened](#) lists. In the same timeframe, our client base expanded from birds that eat entirely or almost entirely insects in the wild to include some species whose natural diet includes other foods at some ages or in certain seasons. Hand-rearing small songbirds can be very challenging, but focusing our efforts on a limited number of species keeps our release rate high. What we ourselves contribute to the process isn't all it takes! The success of these efforts also depends on the support of friends and colleagues in solidarity with our mission, some of whom are named on p. 2. To all of you, plus others unnamed (but you know who you are!), we look forward to your company on the road ahead!

See you in the spring!

Diane & Marc

February
2026



In Memoriam

Don Fournier
1960-2025

We miss you, Buddy.



Flight Plan Rehab

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Diane Winn & Marc Payne

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