

**NEW JERSEY**

# Where to take injured animals? New West Milford hospital aims to fill gap for NJ wildlife

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July 18, 2025 | Updated July 19, 2025, 4:19 p.m. ET

A critical new hospital is coming to North Jersey. It's not for people, or even their pets, but for wildlife.

Nestled in 86 wooded acres on an existing wildlife refuge in West Milford, organizers say the [Last Resort Wildlife Refuge](#) will be the state's first 24/7, fully equipped hospital to treat wild animals. It will be open to the public, but only via a hotline, as well as for animal control officers and other rehabbers.

Due to open by the end of summer, Last Resort will fill a major gap in wildlife care in New Jersey, said Nancy Warner, the president and head veterinary nurse for the refuge. Last Resort will offer diagnostic machines like X-rays and other medical equipment normally available only for domesticated animals.

“I will get animals in that have unknown injuries at, you know, some odd hour, and I can't do anything for it until 9 o'clock the next night, when our animal hospital that we currently use is available,” said Warner. “And all I can do is manage its pain and suffering until then. That's not OK with me.”

***Story continues after gallery.***

While the hospital isn't fully operational yet, Warner and her team of volunteers have been caring for injured or abandoned animals at the refuge since 2019.

On a recent visit, it teemed with a bobcat, beavers, foxes and fawns. Rehabbing baby racoons played with toys and climbed around their cages to find hidden Fruit Loops.

The new hospital will be staffed by a volunteer team of four veterinarians and four vet technicians working in shifts. Even after it opens, the nonprofit will need additional funding for other expenses, including completing and maintaining new heating and plumbing systems. The facility's launch was already delayed by the impacts of last fall's [Jennings Creek wildfire](#), which burned 5,000 acres in the area and injured and displaced wildlife.

To raise money for the facility, a GoFundMe has been created at:

<https://gofund.me/8a3b2128>

## **What to do for an injured animal?**

Warner's chief advice to those who find an animal in distress in the wild is to “keep it warm, keep it quiet and do not try to feed it anything by mouth, not even water.”

Wildlife fed with the wrong type of equipment run greater risks of getting fluid into the lungs and developing pneumonia, which Warner can't fix. For animal emergencies, she recommends calling a rehabber like herself.

“Google is not a wildlife rehabber,” said Warner, 53. The public can call the refuge's 24-hour hotline, (973) 506-4353, in emergencies. The [Last Resort website](#) has more tips on what to do if you find a critter in need of care.

On the hotline, Warner assesses the situation by asking a series of questions about an animal's condition. If emergency care is needed, someone will be sent to the scene, or the animal can be brought to the refuge.

Many calls are about educating the public. One common request is from people who find a fawn in their yard with no mother in sight. If the fawn is not crying or visibly

injured, then it's likely fine, according to Warner, with its mom likely to return sometime in the evening, usually between 7 and 9 p.m.

The refuge has cared for over 1,600 animals in 2025, with the final number expected to reach 2,000 by year's end. The demand expands every year as the operation grows, and more people learn about it.

## **Last Resort refuge fulfills a dream**

Warner, who rides a quad around the property, is a licensed rehabilitator who has worked in emergency vet care for 36 years. In 1998, she started the Last Resort Rescue. It largely focused on domestic animals, helping with wildlife rescue on a smaller scale.

In 2019, Warner's dream of opening a full-fledged wildlife center became a reality, when the refuge bought its current property in the Ramapo Mountains. The refuge, run by Warner and a core group of 13 volunteers, deals exclusively with mammals, sending birds, lizards and other animals to rehab facilities that specialize in those species. (The new hospital, however, will provide emergency care for all animals.)

While some organizations' busy seasons revolve around holidays or the weather, Last Resort's is based on when wildlife give birth.

From March to the end of September, it can feel “like a tidal wave,” Warner said.

Rehabbing infants is complicated. Baby animals must be taught the skills needed to survive in the wild before they can be released.

“Their mothers would teach them all that they need to know about — how to source food, forage, hunt, build a den, build a nest, evade predators, how to source water,” Warner said. “We have to do everything we can to try to mimic those circumstances, in that environment, and to create developmentally appropriate challenges for them to learn those things.”

## Raccoons in kiddie pools

The refuge stocks fish in blue kiddie pools so raccoons can learn to fish, and volunteers hide food around enclosures for them to track down. For carnivores, Warner hides seed and other bait to attract smaller animals like mice, which the meat-eaters can then hunt.

The animals are released close to where they were originally found.

‘It’s a lot, but it's very rewarding when you see them grow up and, then you still, like, wonder what are the odds of them making it out there?’ said Lori Ann Inglese Stark, 58, a wildlife apprentice and volunteer who was training for her rehab license.

Warner wants to leave a legacy through a new generation of wildlife rehabilitators who will uphold a high standard of care in the profession. That legacy also includes "gold star" medical and emergency care at the hospital along with enrichment that teaches animals how to survive after release.

**'Goats at Work:'** [Morris County town hires herd to help park overrun with invasive species](#)

"While I am still vertical, it is my mission to build this place and set the bar for the standard of care so that that continues after I'm gone." Warner said.

"And I know that, you know, when I'm not here, that I've taught and trained the whole next generation of rehabbers how to do that, and they will then go on to teach and train the next generation of rehabbers."