

Summer Chillin'

How to help wildlife stay cool when it's too hot to trot

text by RUTHANNE JOHNSON ■ illustration by ROBERT HYNES

While you and your pets can scramble indoors when the mercury rises, wildlife must tough it out outside. Though survivalists to the core, these critters aren't impervious to summer's soaring temperatures.

"The first thing that people notice are usually the squirrels," says Angel Wintrode, president of the Bi-State Wildlife Hotline of Missouri and Illinois. "They'll lay flat on their bellies and people think they are sick ... but they're just trying to beat the heat." People also call about animals sidled up to the shady side of their house, where it's not unusual to spot them sipping from leaky outdoor faucets. To cool down, birds will gape their mouths and spread their wings away from their body. Other animals pant rapidly. Without access to water and shade, heat exhaustion and even death can occur.

For those living in urban and suburban environments, with their expansive lawns, sporadic plantings, and heat-attracting asphalt and concrete, relief from the heat can be hard to find. You can help animals chill out with these simple tips.

SIP 'N' SOAK

Ground-level birdbaths provide a shallow water source for animals such as quail, mice, lizards, opossums, and even snakes. Pedestal and hanging birdbaths are used by birds, squirrels, and chipmunks. Special drippers and solar-powered water fountains or wigglers keep the water moving and fresh. In one of his birdbaths, Jon Friedman placed a flat rock just beneath a dripper. "I've seen finches, cardinals, grosbeaks, and buntings stand on the rock and let the water drip right on them," says Friedman, who owns the Wild Bird Store in Tucson, Ariz. Locate birdbaths away from the afternoon sun in the summer and make sure to clean them once a week.

CRITTERS IN THE MIST

Birdbath misters are inexpensive, use little water, and are easy to set up anywhere. Friedman places his mister (basically a special nozzle connected to a hose) in a tree at a 45-degree angle for optimum water projection. "Sunlight shining through creates this rainbow effect that birds can see from a long distance," he says. "I've seen as many as 17 different species line up shoulder to shoulder on a branch on a hot day to enjoy the mist." Hummingbirds are known to love a good mist bath.

KEEP ON THE SHADY SIDE

Structures such as nest boxes and toad abodes make good critter cooling stations. Just make sure they're shaded from the afternoon heat, advises animal care specialist Kim D'Amico. At The Fund for Animals Wildlife Center in California—an HSUS affiliate—D'Amico's patients have included owlets who leaped from overheated nest boxes located in the direct sun. Toad abodes should have a nearby water source, such as a toad pool fashioned from an upside down trash can lid wedged into the ground and maintained with fresh water. For these reclusive amphibians, plant sedges and ferns around the edges—and add rocks and branches in the water for easy exit.

NOOKS AND CRANNIES

Limit your tendency for too much yard tidying. "Salamanders will hide under leaf litter and logs," says David Celebrezze with the Ohio Environmental Council. Birds and other small critters use brush piles to escape the heat. Rock and wood piles give shelter for snakes, lizards, and other small animals. "Those are great in the desert as places where animals can access deep shade," Friedman says, "and ... lots of different animals will actually tunnel in and create a permanent home."

NATURE'S AIR CONDITIONING

Trees can reduce surrounding air temperatures as much as nine degrees. The air can actually be as much as 25 degrees cooler than the temps above nearby blacktop. Climbing vines, ground cover, and longer grasses also provide good shade sources. "Keeping grass a little longer will help retain moisture and does better against drought conditions," Celebrezze says. "Longer grass also gives animals better cover from predators."

DIPPING SPOTS

Children's swimming pools, stock tanks, and rainwater catch basins are also attractive to wildlife looking for respite from the heat. Be sure to include a drowning prevention device, such as a FrogLog, Skamper-Ramp, or a floating ramp with traction strips, so animals who fall in can crawl or climb their way to safety.

THE COOL EARTH

Mud puddles are easy to create with birdbath drippers, which come with an adjustable valve that connects to an outdoor faucet. "Set the drip at no less than the rate of evaporation and that way you will always have a puddle," says Friedman. Another option is to route air-conditioning condensation into a shallow container for ground-dwelling critters to sip or to create mud puddles for butterflies seeking water and nutrients. Birds and other animals will sometimes cool their feet in the wet earth. Mud puddles can also be made by filling shallow pans with soil, sand, and water. Some animals such as squirrels, cactus wrens, road runners, thrashers, and bears take dust baths to clean and cool off. Keep a mound of soft earth under a shade tree for these critters to roll around in.



STEVEN MERCURIO AND F. MURRAY ABRAHAM

The inspiration for a symphonic tribute to dogs took root shortly after Lola died. World-famous conductor and composer Steven Mercurio and his wife were heartbroken when their 15-year-old poodle succumbed to old age. A sympathetic friend sent them a copy of Eugene O'Neill's *The Last Will and Testament of Silverdene Emblem O'Neill*, in which O'Neill's dalmatian, "Blemie," encourages his owners not to grieve his death but to rejoice in the happy life they provided him.

"I knew immediately that I was going to set it to music," says Mercurio. "I knew that for Lola—and [for] me and my wife."

A Grateful Tail is a four-movement symphony premiering this summer at outdoor venues across the U.S. and in Europe. The program's first half takes listeners on a journey

through time and musical genres, accompanied by a pictorial tribute to famous and heroic pooches. The second half culminates in Mercurio's ode to man's best friend, with Oscar-winning actor F. Murray Abraham singing the part of Blemie.

In this edited interview with staff writer Ruthanne Johnson, Mercurio and Abraham discuss the symphony written for the love of dogs.



Steven Mercurio (left), Ava, and F. Murray Abraham

ON THE iPad:
Listen to F. Murray Abraham reading O'Neill's essay.

Was it difficult to put O'Neill's text to music?

MERCURIO: Impossibly difficult. I studied the text for a long time. When I finished, I realized it shouldn't stand by itself and wrote a movement to be played before it called "Let Sleeping Dogs Lie." I performed it on a tour. I got a bazillion emails from people saying, "Oh, I love my dog too." I realized that the love of dogs is cross-cultural. It has nothing to do with how much money you make. It has nothing to do with race, creed, or color.

Why did you want to be part of this project?

ABRAHAM: It's a fabulous role, and I happen to love dogs. When you play an animal, there are no limits to what you can do. I've played vicious sharks of people and snakes in the grass. But never a dog, such a lovable animal.

So O'Neill's text resonates with you?

ABRAHAM: I have to work at not weeping when I am singing this—because it's hard to cry and sing at the same time.

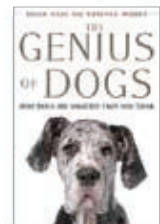
What are your hopes for *A Grateful Tail*?

MERCURIO: Music is not seen but felt. How it gets into the soul and spirit is one of the great questions. I hope the symphony will become something synonymous with dogs, the way the Lincoln portrait is synonymous with Presidents Day or "Appalachian Spring" is representative of Americana. I want the concert to be a destination where people can love and celebrate their dogs.

▶ **WATCH A VIDEO** interview with Mercurio and Abraham at humanesociety.org/allanimals. Get concert details and tickets to *A Grateful Tail* at agratefultail.com.

BOOK SHELF

As a college student, Brian Hare assisted with research into chimpanzees' cognitive abilities. The apes were failing to follow signals such as pointing, which led one of Hare's professors to suggest that only humans can understand such gestures. Hare suspected otherwise, at one point blurting out, "I think my dog can do it."



Now director of a canine cognition center at Duke University, Hare (with his co-author and wife, Vanessa Woods) delves into the subsequent research in *The Genius of Dogs: How Dogs Are Smarter Than You Think*. Researchers have learned more about the way dogs think in the past decade than they did in the previous century, Hare and Woods write, and "the cognitive world of every dog is far more complex and interesting than we thought possible."

BOX OFFICE

When a young orca is orphaned near Vancouver Island, some people want to capture him, while others are willing to risk their lives to keep him free. At the center of the controversy is Luna, a charismatic cetacean who refuses to be ignored. In the documentary *The Whale*, directors Michael Parfit and Suzanne Chisholm capture Luna's story and find their own lives transformed. And in a recently published book—*The Lost Whale: The True Story of an Orca Named Luna*—Parfit and Chisholm tell the story behind the story of their poignant film.



▶ **ON THE iPad:** Read excerpts from *The Genius of Dogs* and *The Lost Whale*, and view *The Whale* film trailer.