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**Dec. 11, 2015**

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**Ben Richey donates habitat to rescued owls**

ABILENE, TEXAS – The Abilene Zoo’s wild bird rehabilitation program has experienced an increase in young or injured birds brought in for help this year, causing staff to look for creative ways to handle the high numbers.

The program treated more than 300 birds in 2015; twenty-eight of those were owls of various species. Last year, the zoo program rescued 284 animals; only 11 of those were owls.

“We always see an increase of birds after windy or stormy weather,” explains April Beard, the zoo’s bird rehabilitation specialist. “This year, we got owls all year long.”

Among the injured birds brought in for help was an owl found in Albany at the Ben Richey Boys Ranch. The boys named him Owlbert, and the vet staff at the zoo treated and released the bird back at the ranch. The event sparked an idea.

The zoo had received a nest of barn owlets found in a chimney in Haskell County, and they all needed a new habitat.

Beard asked the staff at Ben Richey Boys Ranch if they would allow more owls released on their sprawling property in Jones County. When the barn owls were ready to hunt on their own, the zoo staff brought them out to Albany. The boys posed with their owls for photos, bid them farewell and watched as zoo staff released the birds into a clear blue sky.

Each boy received a set of binoculars so he could watch his owl live in the wild.

“It was a very rewarding project for the boys, the owls, and the staff,” Beard said.

**About the Abilene Zoo:** The Abilene Zoo is home to more than 1000 animals of 250 different species. The zoo is open 7 days a week (closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year’s Day) from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Last admittance is 4 p.m. Tickets are \$7 for adults, \$4.50 for children ages 3-12, \$6 for seniors aged 60 and older. Members are admitted free. Memberships start at \$35. [www.abilenezoo.org](http://www.abilenezoo.org). 325-676-6085.

**Mission Statement:** The Abilene Zoo is a place of learning and adventure, where families make memories, share the joy of discovery and become inspired to preserve wildlife.