

A Conversation with  
Jennifer Keats Curtis  
author of  
Animal Helpers:  
Wildlife Rehabilitators,  
Baby Owl's Rescue and  
Turtles In My Sandbox



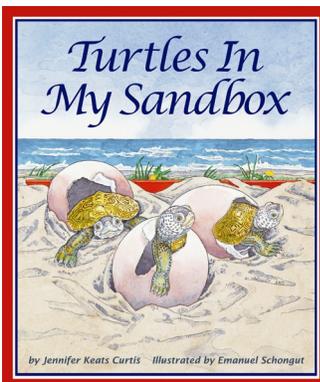
**What was the most interesting part of your research for *Wildlife Rehabilitators*?**

I am increasingly awed by the amount of expertise and experience of wildlife rehabilitators and their ability to care for baby and adult animals that have been orphaned or hurt. EVERYTHING was interesting and I learned something new from all of the experts who so generously shared their work and their photos with me. I was endlessly fascinated by the care of bats and the creative ways in which the rehabilitators have learned to adapt some human medical materials to provide the best care for the animals in their clinics. It is very expensive to provide care for individual animals and I hope that these books will not only help ignite a passion for the right way to treat wild animals in need but also help generate money for the rehabilitators' work.



**Many of your books feature animals in need of help, was this inspired by an encounter you had with a wild animal, or just a natural love of helping others?**

Like the kids for whom I write, I love animals and want to do what I can to help them, when they need it. When I was young, my brother and I found a rabbit that had been attacked by a cat and we desperately tried to save it...to no avail. I grew up to write about animals. My brother became a vet. I think that is one of the experiences that shaped both of us.

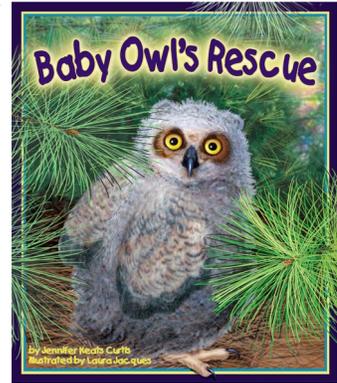


**What was the inspiration for *Turtles in My Sandbox*?**

I think it's important to help kids understand you don't have to be a grownup to make a difference to another living thing. When I learned that kids were raising terps in their classroom and then releasing them and that this program was possibly helping save these animals from endangerment, I jumped at the chance to share it with other kids in a "once upon a time" setting.

## **What was the inspiration for *Baby Owl's Rescue*?**

I love animals of all kinds, and, while my brother is a vet, it is far better for me to research and write about animals than to attempt to do any kind of work on them! After learning about wildlife rehabilitators (who help sick or injured wild animals and then return them to the wild), I had the chance to spend some time with Kathy Woods, a wonderful rehabber who runs the Phoenix Wildlife Center, and found that I was particularly drawn to the raptors (owls, hawks, ospreys).



“What if?” scenarios about a baby owl kept running through my head: What if a baby owl fell out of its tree? What if the parents couldn’t feed it? What if a kid found it? What if the parent owl came back for the baby?

I started researching owls and honed in on Great Horned Owls. I asked Kathy a million questions, then gathered all of what she and some other experts had told me with what I’d learned online and in books to write the book as a realistic fiction. I am so grateful to Kathy for her knowledge and help with the story, and the incredibly selfless way that she helps these animals in need, that I’m donating a portion of the royalties to her center.

## **What is the most frequently asked question you encounter as an author?**

After reading *Turtles in My Sandbox*, younger kids regularly ask me why the mama turtle didn't stay with the babies after she laid her eggs! This was one question I didn't anticipate but I have learned how to answer it!

## **Do you have a favorite wild animal?**

I confess that dogs are still my favorite animal but I think the raccoon might be my favorite wild animal. (I need to say might in case I change my mind next time I go into the clinic to volunteer!)

## **What sparks your creativity?**

Being around kids, observing exciting programs that biologists and wildlife experts are implementing to help save all sorts of creatures, and then being able to ask and have answered my millions of questions in terms I can understand.

## **A lot of parents would like to help their children improve upon their writing. Do you have any advice for them?**

My best advice – and something I help kids work on during writing workshops – is encouraging kids to “throw up” on paper. We talk about making a mess to be creative! A lot of kids also seem to think that as soon as pen hits the paper (or font hits the computer screen), they can't make any changes. Of course, this is not so! Brain dumping helps break that habit by encouraging kids to stop editing in their heads. Get all of those great thoughts down on paper and then rearrange, organize, and edit.

## **What has been most challenging and rewarding about writing *Turtles in my Sandbox*?**

The most challenging part of writing the book for me was making sure that the language was right for my audience. I do have kids within the target age range, but I took the draft to my daughters' school and read with first and third graders (my oldest was a 3rd grader at the time) for help! The most rewarding is, of course, are the unsolicited letters and e-mails that I get from kids who tell me how much they like the book and how they want to be writers, too. I also love hearing how many kids want to help turtles and other creatures in their backyards!

## ***What's next for you?***

I regularly present in schools and the kids always hear me say "I got so excited about [a certain animal], that I had to write about it!" I am so excited about the *Animal Helpers* series that I can't wait to start working on the next one. I'm starting my research as I type this! I will also be working on a new book about jellyfish!

**Want to continue this conversation?** Schedule an interview!

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