



MICHELLE RILEY/HSUS

People Power

BY CARRIE ALLAN

John Griffin and Lori Thiele

It sounds like the trailer for a B movie:

"He took care of great apes in a sanctuary. She studied the use of immunocontraceptives in white-tailed deer. When they met, would their animal instincts take over?" Well, the answer is yes—but not in the way you might expect. Instincts, in this case, prompted John Griffin and Lori Thiele to *help* animals by starting one of the first truly humane wildlife control services in the United States. Griffin had worked on an island off the Carolina coast that was home to a colony of free-ranging rhesus macaques and later at a sanctuary for great apes. After doing graduate work on white-tailed deer, Thiele was working as an animal control officer in College Park, Md. Both of them knew John Hadidian, director of urban wildlife at The Humane Society of the United States—Griffin through his wife, an HSUS employee, and Thiele through her graduate program. Hadidian was looking for animal-friendly people to send north to Toronto, Canada, to study the humane wildlife control methods of Brad Gates, founder of AAA Wildlife Control.

A week that changed everything: The two took a weeklong training course in May 2005, and Griffin says he was impressed by how efficiently and effectively Gates' exclusion methods worked and by how

enthusiastic and dedicated his team was. By August 2005, Griffin had started ACE (Animals, Community, & Environment) Wildlife Services in the Washington, D.C., area; Thiele left animal control to join him in the new project.

How they're different from other services: Griffin and Thiele apply the approach they learned from Gates. Rather than poisoning or lethally trapping the critters who wander into chimneys and attics seeking shelter, they examine structural elements that put out the welcome mat for animals. Then they set up one-way doors that allow the furry and winged inhabitants to leave but not re-enter. This way the critters can fall back on alternate den sites in the vicinity, and moms aren't separated from their babies. Once animals have safely absconded, Griffin and Thiele provide comprehensive exclusion services by sealing gaps and holes in the structure—and offer tips on living in concert with urban wildlife.

Leaving the old school: It was a much desired change for Thiele. As the lone animal control officer in College Park, she had often received wildlife calls that she was allowed to resolve only through trapping and euthanasia (a process required by state law for any trapped rabies-vector species). Thiele often felt pressured by citizens to trap or to lend traps, though as time went by she gave out fewer traps in favor of more education. But the training

with Gates gave her more tools to work with. And once she signed on with ACE, she could go into attics and inspect situations herself; before, she'd been limited by the city's liability concerns. "As an animal control officer, if I went in someone's attic and fell through the ceiling, the city would be mad at me," says Thiele. "And of course you don't have ladders or exclusion materials or anything." But as a part of the new private company, she became insured to do the job as humanely as she's always wanted to.

Humane inclusion: This summer, Griffin and Thiele's little two-person company merged with The HSUS to become Humane Wildlife Solutions. The team now travels the Washington, D.C., area in their truck—"We spend a *lot* of time driving," Thiele says—bringing their new and progressive form of wildlife control to local residents. Since becoming part of The HSUS, they've received more than 500 calls.

The human animal: Though their calls run the urban wildlife gamut, a large share involve situations with raccoons or squirrels; wild birds come in third. But, Griffin says—as with most animal work—the most challenging animals are the people. "The animals may be in different situations structurally, a three-story building rather than a two-story building, or a more inaccessible area inside, so that can make our job there more challenging," he says. "But explaining to people what we're doing and why it's important to do it that way and why it's effective ... and being willing to take the time to talk to them about their problem and then solve it—that's really what the service is."

For more information about The HSUS's Humane Wildlife Solutions program, visit humanesolutions.org. To learn more about shelter involvement in humane wildlife control, see the Sept-Oct 2005 issue of *Animal Sheltering* at animalsheltering.org.