

Urban Wildlife Issues
Wildlife Rescue column by Nicky Fried
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Pileated Woodpecker

Houdini eat your heart out. We have an expert escape artist at the Wildlife Rescue Association (WRA) care centre on Burnaby Lake. No special effects, no tools other than those he was born with.

Every night he is safely locked in his cage. Every morning we find him strutting around the care centre chatting with the other inhabitants. He is a Pileated Woodpecker and his uncommon woodworking ability is giving him free run of the care centre.

The majority of our cages at WRA are wooden; sturdy and natural. (We do not treat the wood.) And there's nothing better from a Pileated Woodpecker's point of view than a slab of wood to sink his bill into. What he's really after is dinner, in the form of ants and other rather small tree dwellers. His excavations are pretty extensive and he leaves a distinctive calling card in the form of a large hole in the tree.



All that drilling can wear down a fellow's tools, which is why this bird's bill continues to grow throughout its life. How fortunate are Woodpecker parents. I'm not sure why we humans are limited to continuous growth of ears and noses. From my experience with children and visits to emergency, I would have thought teeth and knee caps could do with frequent additions, particularly in the younger of our species.

This fellow was brought to us from Bowen Island. From the look of his wounds it was likely that he was attacked by a hawk and then dropped. The Pileated Woodpecker is about the size of a crow, so quite a handful for a hawk. He had a number of puncture wounds which we sutured.

Woodpeckers clearly have great faith in their ability to chip away at a problem, which is why we could not put him in a cage with metal bars. He would probably try and whittle his way out of that, and could do himself serious damage. Instead we moved him to a large outdoor enclosure, where he does not feel the need to escape. Pileated Woodpeckers are year round residents here in the Lower Mainland. They are a lovely sight flashing through the forest, with their distinctive black and white colouring and red crest.

The Pileated Woodpecker is a family bird and community minded. The pairs will stay together year long, defending a territory of a square kilometre or more. And they are happy to share their findings with others. The little House Wren , for example, can often be found feeding at the large holes that the Pileated Woodpecker has made.

Another bird currently in residence at WRA is an American Coot. These birds are a favorite in our family. They are very curious birds bobbing their heads like a wind up toy. Although American Coots often hang out with ducks, and steal their food, they are members of the rail family.

They are wonderfully adaptable birds and can be found frequenting ponds, lakes, marshes, lagoons and city parks. As a result they have unusual lobed feet which allow them to swim and walk. Because they can live in a variety of habitats American Coots will eat a little bit of everything.

The one we have in care right now was found in a yard in Aldergrove. We think it flew into a window or was hit by a car. It had signs of a concussion and some raspiness in its lung. We are treating it with antibiotics and antifungal medications in case of bacterial or fungal infection.

The American Coot may be a year round resident here in the Lower Mainland, although some of them will breed in the interior, and then winter on the coast. If you want to see American Coots bobbing and strutting their stuff, head out to Reifel Bird Sanctuary in Delta as the population is larger at this time of year. You never know, you might see our little fellow, once released.

Nicky Fried writes for the Wildlife Rescue Association of BC located at 5216 Glencarin Drive on Burnaby Lake. The Wildlife Rescue Association cares for injured, orphaned and pollution damaged wildlife. If you have an animal in distress call the WRA at 604.526.7275.