

To The Rescue

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WRA Participates in Hummingbird Research

By Devin Manky, Wildlife Rehabilitator

Why would a group of relatively sane individuals rise from their warm beds at 3:30am on a rainy Saturday morning, head off into the bush and huddle there for five hours? Why, to have an opportunity to trap and band hummingbirds, of course! Waking up early, even on a wet day, wasn't so bad when we could look forward to observing and working with members of the world's family of smallest birds.

Under the guidance of WRA Wildlife Rehabilitator, Roy Teo, and with the invaluable help of naturalist Kiyoshi Takahashi, a handful of staff and WRA volunteers spent many such mornings over the months of May, June, and July. We searched for hummingbirds at several different locations - including our own facility site at Burnaby Lake.

Every second week, the group would gather in the wee hours of the morning and carpool to the banding site. Each person had a crucial role in making sure the operation ran smoothly. Traps had to be set up around feeding stations and one person was given the task of monitoring and activating the trap when necessary. Others needed to be hummingbird trans-

porters - delivering the birds from the traps to the banding table, and placing them in the care of those responsible for applying the tiny bands and gathering measurements from the birds. Additional volunteers

were needed to record observational data such as how many hummingbirds were visiting the trap and how many were actually feeding from it. Finally, everyone involved had the important task of monitoring the status of the birds, making sure their brief state of captivity was not becoming overly stressful - perhaps providing a drink of sugar water to calm them down.

Some mornings, the birds were coming to the banding table non-stop. On the busiest day, 88 individual birds were banded, and on the slowest day, less than 10 birds. The usual pace was a frenzy of activity for the first couple of hours as the birds woke and fed non-stop to get their metabolisms up and running.



Photo courtesy of Devin Manky

Male rufous hummingbird

After this rush to the feeders, generally the pace slowed to the point where conversation among the banders was once again possible. Not all the days were as rainy as described above, quite a few were gorgeous mornings in gorgeous settings - when one had time to enjoy the view!

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To The Rescue

Fall 2005 - Vol. 26 - No. 3

To The Rescue is the newsletter of WRA Wildlife Rescue Association of BC and is produced three times a year

WRA Wildlife Rescue Association of BC provides leadership in the care and rehabilitation of injured, orphaned, and pollution damaged wildlife, primarily in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

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President's Message

By Cynthia Picker

While sitting at the AGM in June, I could hardly believe that another year had passed since WRA's last meeting. My two years as Board President have flown by in what feels like a few days. As I listened to our Executive Director's report on our progress and challenges in 2004, I reflected that even an old organization like WRA could learn "new tricks".



WRA's 2005 Board of Directors. From left to right, Dirk Haack, Liz Thunstrom, Linda Heep, Cynthia Picker, Karim Kassam and Susan Stevens

called for tickets (P.S. If you haven't called yet, there is still time as the prizes won't be drawn until September 21st, 2005. Administration phone: 604-526-2747).

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As you can imagine, board members spend a lot of time thinking about money. We are not fundraising gurus or financial magicians, but we do believe Henry Van Dyke who said, "Use what talent you possess: the woods would be very silent if no birds sang except those that sang best." We think that wildlife is worth "singing" for, and it's obvious to me that many of WRA's supporters feel the same way.



The grand prize in WRA's Raffle for Wildlife

In 2004, we reached out to you during the holiday season, and you responded enthusiastically. Money flowed in and the wild patients in our care were assisted for another season. This summer and fall, we are holding a fundraising raffle for which we have gathered some wonderful prizes. When we announced the raffle in our spring/summer newsletter, many of you

I have to admit that I am challenged by the tough fundraising climate that persists in Canada today. Yet WRA has survived for over 25 years and, with passion and determination, I believe we can thrive for another 25 years. Thanks from the Board to you - our community of supporters - for your ongoing donations, gifts of food for the animals, and your hard work as volunteers.

A Big Thank You!

Our heartfelt thanks to Chevron Canada for donating \$5,000 toward construction of a new outdoor aviary.

Thank you also to the City of Vancouver for a generous grant of \$5,000.

When Disaster Strikes: WRA Responds for Oiled Wildlife

By Jackie Ward, Team Leader

It is an incredible irony that I write this article from the small town of Spruce Grove, Alberta, located a short drive away from the Lake Wabamun oil spill. For the last six days, I have been stationed at the wildlife clean-up site, assisting with the supervision of more than 200 oiled birds and muskrats that were soiled when a CN train derailed and spilled its contents into the lake.

WRA rehabilitators have responded to numerous oil spills over the years, and also regularly treat individual birds that have been impacted by pollution damage. As a consequence, oil spill preparedness is an ongoing goal for both staff and volunteers. But today, preparing this article from the site of a major spill, it is clearer to me than ever why it is critical to have a trained crew in place to respond immediately when a catastrophe occurs.

Recently, as WRA's Team Leader of Wildlife Rehabilitation, I participated in a "1000-tonne oil spill" exercise organized by Burrard Clean Operations. The 'controlled' environment of a practice exercise helps responders ensure that all the necessary planning and training is accomplished before a real emergency occurs. It also allows participants to think about the logistics of a real spill scenario. Perhaps most importantly, it brings all stakeholders together to meet and

establish their own position in the incident command system. The result is a coordinated and cooperative response after a spill.

At the end of the day, present to debrief the event

were approximately 100 personnel, including representatives from both federal and provincial government agencies, a team from Burrard Clean Operations (the company hired to contain and clean up the mock spill), industry professionals from the party responsible for causing the mock spill, staff from Focus Wildlife (the organization hired to coordinate all aspects of the oiled wildlife response), and other stakeholders.

The exercise was an excellent learning experience as participants were able to identify shortcomings in our ability to respond. These shortcomings included the lack of an emergency response trailer to act as a mobile stabilization facility for incoming oiled wildlife, as well as a lack of pre-identified facilities needed for longer term housing and washing of oiled wildlife.

Oiled wildlife response is a specialized field requiring abundant re-



Bathing an oiled grebe at the CN Wildlife Recovery Centre near Lake Wabamun.

sources that must be available immediately after the spill. Unless we are prepared in advance with adequate resources and training, we will be unable to cope in an emergency situation when hundreds or even thousands of animals in distress will require prompt treatment. As I prepare mentally for the exhausting days ahead at the Lake Wabamun spill, I am thankful for all my prior training in BC.

Special Thanks

- ☞ Aurora Celebration Choir
- ☞ Bob Lornie
- ☞ Chevron Canada Limited
- ☞ City of Vancouver
- ☞ Green Earth Organics
- ☞ Ocean Fisheries Ltd.
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- ☞ Voltech Fire Protection

Success Stories

My Summer Job at WRA

By Charlotte Adamson, Wildlife Care Worker

Over the past two years, I have had many opportunities to learn about wildlife by volunteering at WRA. I love coming in week after week and seeing what new and interesting animals we have in care. The only downside is that my four-hour shift per week didn't allow me to observe the patients' progress from day to day. However, that all changed this year when I was hired as one of WRA's six full-time summer students, through a grant from the Summer Career Placement program of Human Resources Development Canada.

This spring and summer, I have had the unique opportunity to observe the progress of many patients on a daily basis. One of my favourite cases is the hatchling dark-eyed juncos (*Junco hyemalis*) that arrived in May. There were five nestlings in all, and the little birds were so young that they didn't even have down covering their tiny naked bodies.

Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, we watched sadly as one by one they met their untimely end. It is very difficult to raise birds in care especially when they are so young, and sometimes no matter what we

do, it is just not enough.

One of the five nestlings, however, refused to give up. He thrived, despite the fact that he was so small and weak, and every day his tiny "peep-peeping" got louder and

louder. Soon his eyes were open and, in what seemed like a very short time, he was fully feathered and trying desperately to fly.

I remember the first time I fed him a live cricket and watched in awe as he expertly leapt down from his perch and matched the cricket hop for hop until he had his prey clutched tightly in his beak. When the junco was ready for release to the wild, I recall the pride I felt because we had helped this little bird to survive.

As the summer comes to an end, I look forward to returning to university to begin my second year in the biology program at Simon



Dark-eyed junco fledgling

Fraser. At that time, I will resume my usual weekly volunteer shift at WRA. However, I will miss having the opportunity to really "get to know" all of the new patients at WRA, and to monitor their daily steps forward.

In the next few pages, I welcome you to enjoy some of the students' success stories with the wildlife in care this summer.

Wish List

-  Bleach
-  Brooms & dustpans
-  CD player, portable
-  DVD player
-  Flashlights, good quality
-  Garbage bags, x-large
-  Gas lawnmower in good working condition
-  Laundry soap, unscented
-  Microscope, dissecting
-  Sharpening stone, knife

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Cliff Swallows

By Al Novin, Wildlife Care Worker

Humans are not the only species that foster children; we can often find similar behaviour among swallows. Adult swallows will feed the babies of other swallows that have been placed in their nests. It is suspected that adults don't realize there are extra young in their nests since certain swallows have deep nests that make it difficult for parents to see their offspring. A swallow's eating and flying habits are difficult for humans to teach so WRA staff members often employ this fostering behaviour in rehabilitation practices.

On June 13th, four abandoned cliff swallows (*Petrochelidon*

pyrrhonota) were brought to WRA's Care Centre. The cliff swallows were fed a species-appropriate diet every 15 minutes until they reached a sufficient weight. Once the swallows had developed their primary feathers, they were switched to a feeding schedule of every 30 minutes.

A short time later, they were placed in a tree swallow's nest in



Minnehada Park with nestlings that were of similar age. As predicted, the tree swallow mother began feeding and raising the cliff swallows as if they were her own babies. Another success story at WRA!



Cedar Waxwings

By Al Novin, Wildlife Care Worker

Few birds love eating fruit as much as the cedar waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) does. Even the courtship of a waxwing involves a fleshy berry being passed around by males as they hop around in dance. That's why on June 27th when two abandoned waxwing nestlings came to WRA, they were given primarily berries and other fruit alongside a high-protein diet. The high-sugar content of the fruit gives the waxwing the right amount of energy to hunt for insects.

The young waxwings were gaping for food with their typical high-trilled buzzing calls. Staff and vol-

unteers fed them every 15 minutes. Over the course of a month, they gained a healthy weight and eventually began self-feeding and flying.

They have now been transferred to an outdoor aviary where they will strengthen their flight

muscles in readiness for release to the wild in a few weeks.



Success Stories

Black-capped Chickadees

By Marcy Potter, Volunteer

Five nestling black-capped chickadees (*Poecile atricapilla*) were discovered orphaned in New Westminster on June 24th. A caring citizen watched the family for two days before removing them from their nesting site to be sure they were definitely abandoned by their parents.

When first examined, all were found to be dehydrated, but otherwise healthy. All were rehydrated and hand-fed every 15 minutes, every day, for the next month. All five of them were voracious eaters of insects, as well as

the formulated bird diet we make here at WRA. They eventually attempted flight, and by July 11th, all were superb flyers!

They are constantly active: hopping, clinging and chirping as chickadees do. In fact, they like to clamour over each other to get to their food! They are currently hand-fed every 45 minutes, and



are starting to self-feed on food left in their aviary. When they reach maturity and are fully self-feeding, they will be released together in to the wild.



Common Loon

By Janice Dickie, Executive Director

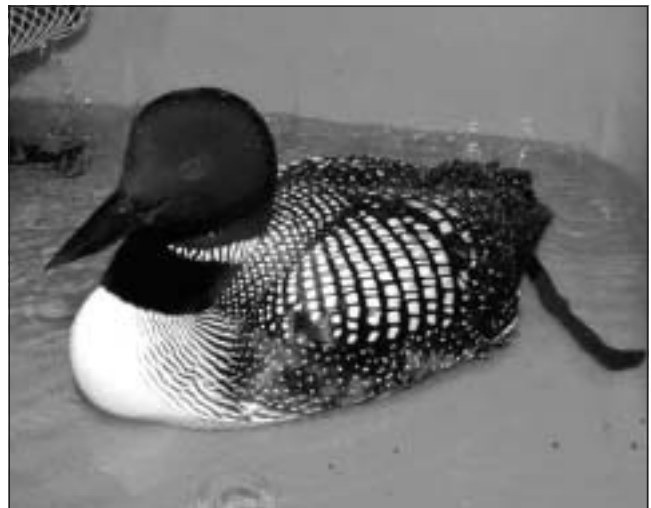
“Landed loon” is common lingo for a loon that has grounded itself by accident. One such loon (*Gavia immer*) was discovered in Surrey on August 7th, and brought to WRA for treatment. Staff members suspect that the loon landed on the ground on a hot day when, from the air, shimmering heat waves were mistaken for the water’s surface.

A loon’s legs are placed far back on its body, which is great for swimming, but not so efficient for getting around on land. Even on the water, this heavy bird often requires up to 100 metres of wing flapping, running steps before becoming airborne. Hence, you can imagine

why a “landed loon” is not a happy bird!

Fortunately for this loon, help was near at hand. The bird recovered quickly from a case of aspergillosis (a fungal infection of the respiratory tract), and minor abrasions on its legs and feet. Within a few days, it was eating healthy numbers of smelt and actively diving in WRA’s

outdoor pool. On August 13th, the loon was released near Ladner, and began diving for food within minutes.



Wood Ducks

By Linda Saunders, Volunteer

On June 6th, a baby wood duck (*Aix sponsa*) arrived at the Care Centre after it was found swimming alone in the Fraser River. On June 8th, it was joined by another wood duck that was found in an excavation hole in Delta. Two days later, yet another duck turned up after it wandered into Burnaby Firehall No. 1 at Canada Way and Sperling. This young duck arrived special delivery via the firehall tanker truck with three firefighters in tow!

All three were housed under heat lamps in an isolation room away from the main care area. Wood

ducks are extremely susceptible to stress, and thus great care is taken to ensure they are kept in a quiet area.

The three ducks grew quite slowly at first but, within three weeks, they were ready to be moved to an outside brooder area with their own private pool, wooden housing, and lots of greenery.



The wood ducks have thrived, especially with the three daily feedings of bloodworms and mealworms to supplement their diet. They are growing rapidly and will be released in a quiet marsh area at the end of summer.



Black-headed Grosbeak

By Marcy Potter, Volunteer

On July 11th, a concerned citizen discovered a fledgling black-headed grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) along a Confederation Park trail, and brought it to the Care Centre at Wildlife Rescue. The youngster was not injured and probably just learning to fly. Although the intentions of the intervening person were good, it may not have been necessary to bring the bird to WRA.

When a young bird is seen on the ground, but appears uninjured, it is crucial to observe the area for a period of time to see if the parents return. The parents will often leave a fledgling bird on its own for several hours or more while they look

for food, but they will normally return. We encourage people to please call the Care Centre before bringing in a young bird so that staff can help determine if the bird is truly orphaned and requires human care.

Raising a young bird in captivity can still be worrisome, as was the case with this grosbeak. Initially, it began losing weight even though it was being hand-fed every 30 minutes. Fortunately, the bird did adjust to its new surroundings and ended up gaining

10 grams in nine days.

At the time of this writing, the grosbeak is thriving, very active, and attempting flight.



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are also by King Fashions and come in two styles to choose from, a shorter fitted version and a longer full version.

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Colours: baby blue, navy or black
 Sizes: S to XL.
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** Special Order Items

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In the Garden

A Walk on the Wild Side

By Dave Tetzlaff, Wildlife Habitat Garden Coordinator

A new visitor to the WRA garden soon discovers that it is not a typical place. Our yard doesn't contain flashy displays of annual colour, neatly clipped hedges, or a manicured, weed-free lawn. For a garden grown to benefit the birds, bugs, and all other critters, is indeed a wild place. The overgrown look may appear untidy, but to our little friends, it just may be paradise.

Most plants in our garden are functional. Some provide shelter, others offer food, and a few ensure that future generations of insects will

survive. But also growing in amongst the salmonberry, bee balm, and butterfly bushes are some less than popular plants. A walk down the garden path will take you past a large blackberry thicket, rudely invading upon its neighbours. Stinging nettle thankfully dangles safely out of reach and outcrops of hairy comfrey shoot up everywhere. The lawn is a mix of clover, buttercup, and moss.

However, these "weeds" are useful. Despite being a terrible, invasive rambler, the Himalayan black-



Painted lady butterfly collecting nectar

berry is easily one of the best wild-life plants we have. It offers excellent shelter; is an obvious food source, and its blooms are magnets for butterflies. At one time, 12 Painted Ladies and five Western Swallowtails were counted enjoying the nectar and soaking up the sun on a clump of blackberry.


Our stinging nettle occupies a moist lower corner and it is the last plant you would want to encounter. However, along with clover in the lawn, it serves as larval host plants for butterflies. Adult butterflies lay their eggs on the plant and as eggs hatch, the larvae feed on the leaves. And then there is the comfrey. Its large, coarse, hairy leaves can be irritating to the skin and its invasive nature is frustrating to most gardeners. Digging it out is impossible, for it has a large tap root and any piece left behind will grow back and laugh at you. But it produces a beautiful bluish flower and the bees love it, and we love the bees, so we all just try to get along.

This year's early summer wet weather brought on an army of slugs, all invading the new, tender, and tasty plants in the Hummingbird Grove. It was a perfect op-

(Continued on page 10)

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Hummingbird Research continued

(Continued from page 1)

The information gathered during the days in the field is part of a larger hummingbird monitoring and population study in North America. Hummingbirds, though small, are hardy birds that migrate over long distances. Without a methodical study over many years of their population numbers, we cannot know how human settlement and distribution is affecting their numbers and breeding locations. The nearly 200 birds banded by the WRA group have already headed back down to Mexico and parts of Central America for the winter and will not return to BC until late March. Hopefully, some of those

birds banded this year will be re-trapped next season, giving banders additional knowledge of their lives in the wild.

What an extraordinary experience it was to hold one of these unique creatures in the palm of my hand, with its heart beating over 1000 beats per minute, and then opening my hand and watching the bird hum away in a blink of an eye. The things we get to do in the name of research!

We are always on the lookout for good hummingbird banding sites. If you know of a location where



Photo courtesy of Devin Manky
Measuring wing length on a female rufous hummingbird

many hummingbirds are approaching feeders, please contact Devin Manky at WRA.



In the Garden

(Continued from page 9)

portunity to try out a different method of slug coexistence. Instead of using the usual methods such as copper tape, egg shells or trapping, we used bait plants. One of the slugs' favourite plants to devour is the common marigold. Several marigolds were planted at the garden edge and around the plants we wanted to protect. The slugs were drawn to the marigolds instead and all one had to do is hand pick them off. I would gather dozens of slugs, three times a week using this method. The final result was excellent, with little damage occurring to the rest of the garden. The Echinacea was lost, so the method isn't perfect. But a \$12 flat of marigolds served us well. The slugs were transferred down the road to live another day!

For information about wildlife habitat gardening or volunteering in our wildlife garden, Dave the gardener, can be reached by email at davetetzlaff@lightspeed.ca.



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Foster Me!

By Marcy Potter, Volunteer

The distinguished great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*) is easy to recognize, with its long sharp beak and dominating stance. Two of these regal birds arrived at WRA in mid-July.

One fledgling was found trying to fend off an attack by a group of crows. Examination revealed mild dehydration, lacerations and bruises. Medication was administered twice daily and it was also hand-fed twice a day. The fledglings weight is now increasing and it is eating on its own.

The other great blue heron admitted in care appears to have been hit by a car and left on the side of the road. It had large puncture wounds and parasites. This bird's wounds have been sutured, and rehabilitators are administering antibiotics.

The outlook is good for both birds and we expect that they will be ready for release later this season.



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