

# To The Rescue

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## Oiled Wildlife Rehabilitated but Weak Laws Leave B.C. Wildlife Vulnerable

By Janice Dickie, Executive Director and Craig Fisher, President of the Board

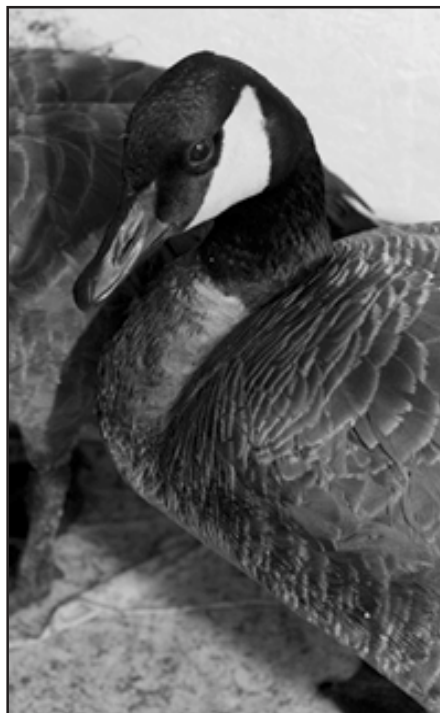
The fallout after July's oil spill in Burrard Inlet has caused many wildlife groups to fear that thousands of impacted wildlife could die the next time a major oil spill occurs in B.C.

July's 1000-litre oil spill in Vancouver left 52 rescued wild birds languishing in a temporary treatment facility for over a week, and more waiting to be rescued, because the responsible party, a Hong Kong-based shipping company, did not want to pay the full costs of rehabilitating the birds.

The company had contracted with Focus Wildlife Ltd. to lead the wildlife rescue operation, but then quickly capped the budget at an amount far below the expected costs. At one point, the company pulled wildlife rescue crews from the water for over an hour due to the budget dispute with Focus, but the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) overruled the order and instructed the crews to return to the water. The company later refused to pay Focus Wildlife for the full staffing costs related to the rehabilitation effort.

WRA Wildlife Rescue Association

of BC has worked in partnership with Focus Wildlife since 2004.



Oiled Canada Goose

Focus Wildlife is an internationally respected company that offers oiled wildlife emergency response services around the world, most recently saving hundreds of wildlife while working for CN during Alberta's Lake Wabamun spill last year. Working together, WRA and Focus Wildlife are able to mount a timelier and more effective response for wildlife impacted by oil spills in B.C.

In the absence of adequate Canadian regulations that would force the polluter to pay, WRA called on the federal government to cover the rehabilitation costs of the Burrard Inlet oiled birds. Wildlife response expenses typically comprise one to five percent of the overall oil spill cleanup costs.

Despite the public outcry, local political support and extensive media coverage of the case, CWS did not respond and even considered euthanizing the birds if the shipping company abandoned the rescue effort. The B.C. wildlife rehabilitation community was left pondering how the federal government could wash its hands of the case, given that CWS is responsible for the oiled birds under the Migratory Birds Convention Act

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## To The Rescue

Fall 2006

Vol. 27- 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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# Director's Message

## My Life at Wildlife Rescue

By Liz Thunstrom, WRA Board Member

In the summer of 1979, I found a badly injured robin in my garden. I knew the Nature House at Burnaby Lake took in injured wildlife, since my family had often visited to see the ducklings in care.

Sadly, the robin, did not survive, but I was told about the newly incorporated Wildlife Rescue Association that offered home care and even a veterinarian to look after injured wildlife, since the

numbers had outgrown the naturalists' abilities to care for them.

As a life-long nature lover, I offered my services to the new organization. My first volunteer role was to transport wildlife from the Coquitlam SPCA to WRA during the summer months. From a few animals every other month, it soon became a flood and I was also entrusted to do home care. A parade of fledgling birds, orphaned possums, and flying squirrels shared my home until they were weaned, at which time they were returned to WRA for release.

Until 1984, WRA operated only in the summer months, but thereafter the first staff person was hired and the facility began operating all year around. In the fall of 1984, I was hired part-time to assist with ani-

mal care. A few years later WRA faced a major oil spill with over 500 sea ducks brought in from Vancouver harbour. We had few helpers and water had to be brought in by the Burnaby Sewer crews, as the

well went dry from all the bird washing.

Wildlife caseloads increased every year and in 1989, the Association moved to the south side of Burnaby Lake and into a roomy new care

building. The need for skilled volunteers grew and I was put in charge of creating a volunteer training program (some of the original volunteers are still with WRA after all these years). I also obtained a bird banding permit from the Canadian Wildlife Service to allow WRA to band birds being released. WRA is still one of the few centres in North America to be able to band rehabilitated birds.

My next role was in community outreach, presenting to children and adults and eventually handling media interviews. To my surprise, I came to really enjoy the role of WRA spokesperson and I stayed in that position until retirement in 2000. I am now back full circle to the role of volunteer, this time on WRA's Board of Directors.

*Continued on next page*

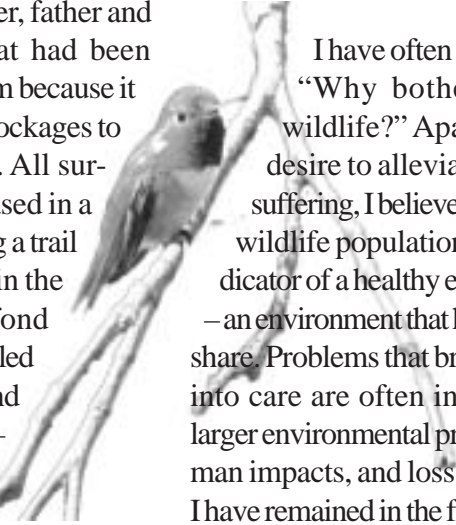


Liz Thunstrom - 1994

## My Life at Wildlife Rescue *(Continued from previous page)*

Over the years, I was part of many memorable cases, including the beaver family (mother, father and two youngsters) that had been blasted from their dam because it was causing water blockages to a nearby urban area. All survived and were released in a safer location, leaving a trail of chewed supports in the aviaries! Another fond memory is the Red-tailed hawk – hit by a car and blinded in one eye – that was rehabilitated and subsequently re-

turned to her mate and her regular perch after release.



I have often been asked, “Why bother to treat wildlife?” Apart from the desire to alleviate pain and suffering, I believe that healthy wildlife populations are an indicator of a healthy environment – an environment that humans also share. Problems that bring wildlife into care are often indicators of larger environmental problems, human impacts, and loss of habitat. I have remained in the field of wild-

life rehabilitation for over 25 years because I truly believe that caring for individual animals can lead to caring on a larger scale, something we are often missing in today’s world. Children often ask me, “Animals don’t feel pain, do they?” I hope to help them understand that suffering is not only a human experience, and that both people and animals are part of nature. We will all be poorer if there are few creatures left to share the world.



### Don’t miss out! Buy your Raffle for Wildlife tickets!

Help support WRA! Purchase *Raffle for Wildlife* tickets at WRA or telephone 604.526.2747.

- #1 **GRAND PRIZE: Douglas Charles - “Mouse” Original Painting (Value \$700)**
- #2 **Get Spoiled Prize Package (Value \$756)**
- #3 **Golf Prize Package (Value \$735)**
- #4 **Night on the Town Prize Package (Value \$550)**



The draw will be held on Wednesday, October 18, 2006 at WRA. Attendance is not required at the draw to win. All winners will be contacted by telephone. Winners’ names will also be published in the Winter 2007 edition of the “To The Rescue” newsletter and on our website.



Tickets are available until October 2, 2006. Ticket prices are \$4 each or 3/\$10. A maximum of 4,000 tickets will be sold.

Rules of play are available at the WRA Administration Office. BC Gaming Event Licence No.: TR-RG26307  
*Know your limit, play within it. For Help: 1.888.795.6111 or [www.bcreponsiblegambling.ca](http://www.bcreponsiblegambling.ca)*

# Success Stories

## American Goldfinch

By Juliet Mohlmann, Volunteer

A young orphaned American goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*) was brought into WRA in mid-July. The finder had watched the little bird for several hours before capturing it, wanting to make sure it was truly abandoned.

This goldfinch was almost fully grown and could fly fairly well but was still dependent on its parents for food. It would play with the food in its dish instead of eating. The little bird therefore needed to be hand-fed initially, but soon learned to eat on its own. The young goldfinch was then moved

into a cage with other birds. Recalling our old kindergarten report card, the case sheet noted that it was, “fitting in well with the other finches.”

Staff and volunteers continued to monitor the bird’s weight and health. Before long, the bird was moved to an outside aviary where it could acclimatize to the outdoor environment and further practise its flying skills. At the time of writing, the young goldfinch is doing well and is nearly ready to be released.



Photographed By Paul Steeves

American Goldfinch



Photographed By Paul Steeves

Summer Staff member gently feeds juvenile hummingbird.

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## Coming Soon... New Website for WRA!



[www.wildliferescue.ca](http://www.wildliferescue.ca)

Later this fall WRA will launch a colourful new website featuring photos and videos, and tips on how to co-exist with wildlife.

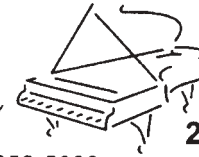
## In Memory Karie Olin

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## Killdeer

By Charlotte Adamson, Summer Staff

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferous*) are generally associated with their close cousins, the Plovers, which are primarily shorebirds. Thus, many people are surprised to learn that killdeer do not normally live close to the ocean.

Killdeer nest in areas near open space and gravel. Nests are nothing more than a shallow depression in the ground where the eggs are deposited. This poses problems for the parents who must closely monitor the eggs and the young birds until they learn to fly. Female killdeer go to great lengths to protect the babies, including faking a broken wing to lure would-be predators from the nest!

On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, we received two orphaned killdeer from Hastings Park in Vancouver. These birds are sometimes difficult to raise in captivity because they are easily stressed and prone to leg injuries. One advantage, however, is that they are precocial birds, which means that they are able to feed on their own from birth. Hence, once rehabilitators established that they were eating well, little else was required other than to monitor their health and growth until they learned to fly.



Photographed By Paul Steeves

Young Killdeer

After a little more than a month, the birds were flying gracefully. They were successfully released at Confederation Park in Burnaby.



# Success Stories

## Green Heron

By Marcy Potter, Volunteer

A fledgling green heron (*Butorides virescens*) was spotted on the 17<sup>th</sup> hole of the Fort Langley Golf Course in late July. A member of the public watched the heron for an extended time, and brought the bird to care when the parents didn't show up to feed or protect him.

The initial exam revealed the heron was slightly dehydrated, thin and very stressed. Due to his age and the stress of captivity, he would not eat on his own and had to be hand fed. Finally, after four days, the bird began self-feeding. He's

now gained weight and is attempting to fly in his aviary.

The fascinating green heron is more than just an attractive bird. This species has been known to drop a feather on a pond's surface, using it to lure the little fish that are their prey!



Photographed By Paul Steeves

Green Heron

## Marmots

By Juliet Mohlmann, Volunteer

Marmots are a common sight to hikers around the province. They live in and around rocky slopes and spend the summer eating or basking in the sunshine, rarely straying far from their burrows. But apparently wanderlust occasionally sets in, and the preferred means of transportation for these chubby travellers may be the Greyhound bus!

Two marmots recently arrived here as stowaways on buses coming from the Interior. A hoary marmot (*Marmota caligata*) turned up at the Coquitlam bus station in mid-May. Then a yellow-bellied marmot (*Marmota flaviventris*) was found at Granville and 23<sup>rd</sup> in late

July. Both were in good health, but in need of some assistance getting home again.

Marmots are well known for their shrill whistles when frightened – a warning to other marmots to take cover. This whistle, however, is deafening at close range, prompting staff and volunteers to wear earplugs when going anywhere near a marmot's pen.

After short stays at WRA, each animal was transferred to the BC



Photographed By Paul Steeves

Yellow-bellied Marmot

Wildlife Park in Kamloops. On their way back to the mountains, they travelled not as stowaways but as honoured guests.



## Vireos

By Charlotte Adamson, Summer Staff

On July 9th, WRA received a pair of nestling songbirds that no one could identify. Without feathers and other distinguishing characteristics, only the beak and relative size of a bird gives clues to its species.

Beak shape helps us to determine if the bird is a seedeater such as a finch or sparrow, or a more generalized eater such as a robin. We noted that these birds' beak shapes were similar to an insect eater and started the nestlings on the appropriate diet. Sadly, the smaller and weaker of the two didn't survive, leaving us with just one of the mystery birds.

As the remaining bird grew, we soon discovered it was a vireo. Another nestling vireo was admitted on July 18th, which looked like a smaller version of the first. However, upon closer inspection, we identified it as a warbling vireo (*Vireo gilvus*), while our original patient turned out to be a red-eyed vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*). Volunteers are currently hand feed-

ing the pair, and they will soon be released back to the wild.



Photographed By Paul Steeves

Young Vireo



## Red-breasted Sapsucker

By Juliet Mohlmann, Volunteer

On June 11<sup>th</sup>, a red-breasted sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber*) was brought into WRA with a fractured keel and swelling of the chest and sides. The keel is an enhanced breastbone that provides an anchor point for the wing muscles. Damage to the keel can weaken the wing muscles and cause difficulty flying.

The swelling was caused by damage to the bird's internal air sacs. When a bird breathes, air goes through a series of these air sacs, and then passes one-way through the lungs (as opposed to our in-out system). An injury to the chest area can puncture these air sacs,

allowing air to leak into the body but trapping it beneath the skin.

Despite its potentially very serious injuries, the endearing little bird made a surprisingly quick recovery. The swelling subsided, and the keel healed over nicely. It's interesting to note that sapsuckers are only short-distance migrators, so keel injuries are not as large a concern when compared to many other species. After just over a month in care, the sapsucker was released in Minnehada Park in Coquitlam.



Photographed By Paul Steeves

Red-breasted Sapsucker



# Oiled Wildlife Rehabilitated but Weak Laws Leave B.C. Wildlife Vulnerable

*(Continued from page 1)*

As the days passed and the wildlife care bills mounted, the government's avoidance of the problem left Focus Wildlife in an untenable position as the caregivers of the oiled birds. Focus' only choices were to turn over the birds to CWS for euthanasia in order to avoid significant financial loss, or to commit its own funds to the cleanup effort. In the end, Focus refused to use the oiled animals as bargaining chips in a battle with bureaucrats and the international shipping company. Focus determined that it would continue to help the birds so that they would be treated humanely and offered a second chance at life in the wild.

Seventeen days after the spill on July 20th, the cleaned and rehabilitated birds were released in North Vancouver's Cates Park.



Focus Wildlife, a small company, was nearly brought to its knees in the process. As controversy over this case continues to swirl in the media, many B.C. citizens are asking why a multimillion-dollar company can spill oil in B.C. waters, and then

refuse to pay the full costs of the wildlife cleanup effort.

Since the mid 1990s, United States government regulations have forced the responsible party to pay not only for the full costs of the oil and shoreline cleanup but also the oiled wildlife rescue and rehabilitation efforts. Most European countries follow a similar procedure, and the European Union is also developing an international response plan by which Member States, individually and/or jointly, could achieve a higher state of preparedness for oiled wildlife incidents.

Canada's environmental legislation lags behind these international standards. Polluting companies must pay for the costs of the oil cleanup but not necessarily for the rescue and rehabilitation of the wildlife impacted by the spill. CWS can fine the responsible party, up to \$1 million under the Migratory Birds Convention Act, but the polluter is not automatically required to save the oiled wildlife. It is up to CWS to determine whether a rescue effort will be mounted and, in the past, rehabilitation is normally considered only for species at risk.

Prior to 2004, the province of BC had no official organized response for wildlife in the event of oil spills. Not-for-profit organizations such as WRA and the SPCA would lead



*Oiled Cormorant*

the rescue and rehabilitation of wildlife impacted by spills in the Lower Mainland – relying on volunteers, public donations and corporate goodwill to support the effort.

In recent years, the wildlife rehabilitation community has attempted to educate Canadian and B.C. government agencies responsible for wildlife about the difficulties of an unorganized approach during environmental crises. We have seen that the infrastructure, staffing and equipment needed to mount an effective response were beyond the resources of a charity working on its own, especially when most B.C. rehabilitation facilities are now filled to capacity with regular wildlife patients most months of the year. Moreover, a publicly funded response enabled polluting companies to escape financial responsibility for the wildlife endangered by their spills.

*Continued on page 10*

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WRA is pleased to announce that the 2007 Wildlife Calendars are now available! These works of art feature the beautiful photography of renowned wildlife photographers Bill and Serena Keay. Each month showcases a different animal from across Canada. When opened, the calendar measures 13"W x 22" H.

Funds raised from the calendar will go to WRA for wildlife rehabilitation and to the Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society (NWPS) to support environmental education.



**Price: \$20 (including PST) and can be purchased at WRA or by calling the WRA administration line at 604.526.2747.**

# Oiled Wildlife Rehabilitated but Weak Laws Leave B.C. Wildlife Vulnerable *(Continued from page 8)*

Since 2004, Focus Wildlife and WRA, as B.C.'s leading responders for oiled wildlife, have been working with both federal and provincial governments and Burrard Clean Operations to plan for a more effective and humane response for wildlife in the event of major oil spills in B.C. Together, we have led the oiled wildlife response section of industry-sponsored mock oil spill training exercises. Focus is also currently lending its expertise to a federal-provincial Wildlife Branch development project that seeks to increase capacity for oiled wildlife response in B.C.

Given the government focus on training exercises and contingency planning research over the last two years, both WRA and Focus Wildlife were well prepared to participate in the wildlife section of the overall "Incident Command System" in the event of a real spill. Hence, it was both shocking and unsettling to see the system fall apart so quickly after the Burrard Inlet spill. What no one could have predicted is that the polluting company would refuse to pay the full costs of wildlife cleanup, and that the government would not have the legislative authority or interest in forcing compliance.

WRA fears that B.C. will lose the services of expert oiled response

teams like Focus Wildlife if polluters are not forced to pay. The next big oil spill could put thousands of birds or other species at risk, and we dread what will happen to them



*WRA team performs an oil spill bath.*

if Canada's only oiled wildlife response specialists have left B.C. due to the lack of government support.

In August 2006, The Oiled Wildlife Society of BC (OWSBC) and the Wildlife Rehabilitators Net-



*Pre-release Conditioning Pool*

work of BC (WRNBC) issued a joint statement that called on the Canadian Wildlife Service, the BC Ministry of Environment and local governments to acknowledge and accept that oiled wildlife response

is today an internationally recognized profession that operates according to strict protocols and standards of care. The statement reinforced that there are specific guidelines for oiled wildlife management, facilities, operations, equipment and techniques. Oiled animals suffer even more when treated by untrained or inexperienced personnel.

It was with mixed emotion that WRA and Focus Wildlife released the rehabilitated birds after the Burrard Inlet spill. We felt joy to see their return to the wild and yet sadness that questions remain about the fate of future oiled birds in B.C.

On that day, we told reporters that the Burrard Inlet case made it clear that regulators and industry in British Columbia and Canada are ill-prepared to deal with oiled wildlife issues and have a long way to go to meet international standards for the care of wildlife imperiled by oil spills. We indicated that the Canadian government must choose whether it will accept international standards and put protective legislation in place for oiled wildlife, or whether it will continue to ignore wildlife's suffering and allow pol-

luters to determine how to treat Canada's environment. As we said on that day, simply choosing not to make a decision is a decision in itself.



# Foster Fur & Feathers



*Black-throated Grey Warbler*

As a wildlife fosterer, your donation helps to support the care of an injured bird or mammal. Each sponsor receives a Foster Certificate, which includes a picture of the patient and a brief case history describing the injury and rehabilitative treatment provided. Profiled below is one of the many patients that your contribution will help.

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*Please make cheques payable to: Wildlife Rescue Association of BC, 5216 Glencarin Drive, Burnaby BC, V5B 3C1, Admin: 604.526.2747*

## Foster Me!

### Striped Skunk

*By Marcy Potter, Volunteer*

In early July, Wildlife Rescue's Care Centre was inundated with striped skunks. Within one week, seven juvenile skunks were brought to care for various reasons, and yes, although they were young, they knew how to spray! On top of that, a few had been given the wrong types of food before coming to care at WRA, so they were even more smelly than a skunk should be!

Most of the young skunks were orphaned, and facing problems

from dehydration and ticks, to inability to feed on their own. Re-hydration, hand feedings and medications were started. A car had likely hit one of them, as he was suffering from central nervous system (CNS) damage. This skunk was treated for CNS (symptoms include wobbly, weak legs and slow pupil dilation), and in a few days showed great improvement.

The young skunks are housed together in one of our large mammal pens, so they can learn from each other and socialize. They will re-



*Young Skunks*

main in care until they are old enough to feed and fend for themselves.

**Wildlife Rescue Association of BC**  
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**Burnaby BC**  
**V5B 3C1**



## Yes, I want to support WRA

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Request for information: I would like information on:

- volunteer opportunities  planned giving  I have remembered the WRA in my will