Oiled Pelicans and Commitment - Nancy Aaron

Applying cutting-edge cleansing procedures to oiled birds has become something of a precise science in the 21st Millennium. But on a Friday in early October, 1987, when Nancy Aaron and volunteers with the Central Coast Wildlife Rehabilitation Guild (Pacific Wildlife Care’s former name) learned that 40 or so “oiled” pelicans were struggling to survive in Avila Beach, appropriate oiled bird handling procedures were in the very early stages.

That Friday was Nancy’s bird rescue baptism, she explained during an interview in her Morro Bay home. A close friend called the group together: “Get in the van girls, we’re going on a mission, and that was it. We rescued 47 pelicans that were stranded on the beach in Avila.

“The pelicans were too weak to fly. We got them boxed up and transported them to Camp San Luis Obispo. The men in the Guild built plywood holding pens and put nets over the top of the pens,” Nancy continued, showing photos and stories from her thick, illustrative scrapbook.

“They hosed the poor things down while the rest of us bathed them at the sink with Dawn soap.” However, during this process, the group realized these birds were not covered with fuel oil. (The sunken freighter, the “Pac Baroness” carrying 386,000 gallons of fuel oil, collided in heavy fog 15 miles west of Point Conception on September 21 with the “Atlantic Wing” vessel, transporting 3,451 Honda automobiles.) Instead of fuel oil – which bubbled profusely to the surface from the sunken Pac Baroness – the bird’s feathers were actually fouled with oil dispersant, a toxic petroleum-based substance that had been illegally dumped by helicopter on the 10-mile oil spill by a group called “Clean Seas,” Nancy explained.

Well before there was a PWC Wildlife Rehab Center, Nancy and the core group of about 25 volunteers were in fact pioneering local rescue and rehabilitation strategies. Nancy held sessions in her home on feeding baby birds that fell from nests. She turned her back guest house into a place for birds that needed to learn to fly, and her downstairs bathroom was used to rehab baby swallows.

“Our houses, our garages, our bathrooms, were all converted for use in rescuing birds. It was what you did,” she said, adding that “The resources that PWC has today, with so many volunteers, is wonderful.”

Having a full-time wildlife veterinarian on staff “…is a million dollar acquisition,” she added, recalling all of the local vets that in the past graciously assisted the organization.

In an hour’s conversation with Nancy Aaron, her emphasis is not just on what she and the original core group contributed, but also on the amazing growth, sophistication, professionalism and compassionate energy at PWC today.

“What a difference today!” she says. Nancy is a proud member and contributor, and is impressed with the 800 members and nearly 200 volunteers that cared for over 2,400 injured or orphaned wildlife last year. “What a difference!” Nancy repeated.

– Story & photo by John FitzRandolph

“We”, “You” and our “Fund-Our-Vet Matching Angels” did it!!

We raised the funds to contract with wildlife veterinarian, Dr. Shannon Riggs, for another year!

Hooray for us and, “good news” for the orphaned and injured wildlife who will pass through our Rehab Center’s doors in 2015!

Photo – Dr. Riggs records her medical findings following an examination
READY FOR RELEASE

By Pamela Hartmann

You can't just toss a wild animal back into the wild after its wounds are healed. Wildlife rehabilitators must ensure that the animals are prepared to survive when released.

Baby Raccoons

Orphaned baby raccoons need so much attention that it is preferable for home rehabilitators to raise them than to keep them at PWC’s Morro Bay Center. This year, PWC volunteer Shelly Larsen accepted four orphaned newborns. It was a big commitment. Newborns have to be fed first by syringe and then by bottle four to five times a day, and “when they’re so young,” says Larsen, they “need the mothering.” But as they get older, they need to be “wilded up” for release – in other words, prepared to survive on their own in the wild. To accomplish this, she kept the raccoons away from cats and dogs so that they retained their fear of this potential danger. And as soon as possible, she greatly decreased the amount of nurturing because “you don’t want them imprinting.”

Then she taught them to forage. After the young raccoons were weaned from the bottle, she placed food in three different containers in their enclosure: one for fruit and vegetables, one with water and fish, and one – a trough – with dirt, rocks, and leaves (as in a forest) and foods such as peanuts and worms for which the raccoons could practice foraging.

Larsen’s efforts paid off. On the day she was to release her four charges, they were so wild that “the toughest part was catching them.”

An Elegant Tern

On November 22, Kathleen Dillon drove back to Morro Bay from Coyote Bait and Tackle in Morgan Hill, near San Jose, with two five-gallon tubs filled with water in the back of her Fiat. The tubs had holes in the lids and a battery aerator to keep alive the 40 dozen minnows she was bringing back to Pacific Wildlife Care.

The minnows were intended for one bird, the aptly named Elegant Tern, admitted to PWC with a broken wing and assigned case #14-1706. With a wing fixator placed by PWC veterinarian Dr. Shannon Riggs, the bird’s movements were restricted while she healed in a small enclosure inside a much larger flight aviary with a long pool. This aviary was filled with the usual denizens – pelicans, cormorants, and gulls – but also dozens upon dozens of grebes clamoring for fish. #14-1706, “this tiny, delicate bird,” as Dillon describes her, had arrived in the middle of the grebe crisis.

Initially, #14-1706 refused to eat the frozen, thawed smelt fed to the other ocean birds. This challenge provided an opportunity to try out the newly created “Minnow Project.” For some time, Riggs had been researching ways to provide certain birds with live-hunting experience. “What started this,” says Dillon, “was that we had nestlings” so young that their “mother had never taught them to hunt” for fish. For these Green Herons, Snowy Egrets, and Black-Crowned Night Herons, survival in the wild requires an ability to live-hunt fish on their own before they can be released.

With guidance from Riggs, Dillon implemented the set-up of pools and pumps and found a source for minnows. The fish were kept in a 150-gallon tub with water, water hyacinths, and bubblers for oxygen. Several times each day, minnows were carefully scooped out, still in water (because even a few seconds out of water would kill them) and placed in a shallow container of water in the tern’s enclosure. Each time, #14-1706 immediately perched on the edge of the container and hunted the fish swimming in it.

The initial obstacles and challenges of setting up the project were overcome, and it was a success. For #14-1706, the project’s implementation was timely: practice with live hunting was essential because “this is a bird that migrates thousands of miles,” Dillon says. “She has to be in perfect condition.”

Raptors

Owls, hawks, and eagles also must be in “perfect condition.” These raptors, Claudia Duckworth says, “have to be athletes,” with endurance and conditioning for the speed, height, and exquisite maneuvers essential to hunting prey in the wild.

Twenty years ago at PWC, Duckworth and Melinda Alvarado turned to a local falconer to train them in the ancient art of creemcing, exercising a bird on a 150-foot line. The line is attached to jesses, which in turn are attached to anklets around the bird’s legs. Often, the first day out, a bird isn’t able to do more than just “hop along the ground,” Duckworth says. This is proof, if common sense weren’t enough, that a bird whose wounds have healed is not yet ready for release. “If things go well,” the bird will fly a little the next day – and then further and further. The goal is ten 150-foot flights in succession before the bird is considered for release.

Some birds need more time. For Great Horned Owl case #13-757, brought to PWC with serious injuries from barbed wire, it took over a year before veterinarian Shannon Riggs was able to write on his chart, “Can’t believe this day has arrived, but he is ready for release.”

And this is the goal for all animals at Pacific Wildlife Care: that they become fully “ready for release.”
Barbara Kuperman
Mary E. Risa Kaiser
Debra Renick

we saw a cormorant stranded along sandspit in Montana de Oro when with my friend, Judy, on the I was riding my horse, Cisko, along the tide line. I called the PWC rescue line and left a message. I also called a friend, Richard Grise (PWC volunteer), who suggested I call Mark Garman (rescue/transport). We rode our horses back to the barn, and I got a cloth shopping bag out of the car. Usually, when I open the back of my car, it’s to put Cisko’s saddle in before I take him back to the barn. Well, he was quite disappointed to say the least, when I got back on and made him go back out over the dunes.

The bird had not moved, so I dismounted and tried to catch the bird while holding Cisko’s reins in one hand and the bag in the other. The bird was scared and tried to hobble back into the water. So, I waited for two young women I saw strolling down the beach to reach me and enlisted their help.

While one held Cisko at a safe distance away, the other held the bag while I caught the bird and settled him into the bag. Cisko had started prancing and whinnying while I was trying to catch the bird. Luckily, he did not step on the bare feet of the girl holding him! I think he thought I was abandoning him, but I was more worried that he would abandon me (as I know he can find his way home on his own)!

I tied the bag to the pommel of the saddle and mounted up. Luckily, the bird was still and quiet the whole way back. I was afraid it would start flopping around against Cisko’s shoulder and freak him out.

I put the bird in the back of the car with the saddle while I gave Cisko a much-needed hose-down. During the trips to the beach the clouds had burned off and it was pretty warm. He was sweaty from nose to tail and puffing hard. He is 26 years old, in fairly good shape, but this was more exercise than he is used to in a day.

I was glad the bird didn’t venture out of the bag to explore and poop inside my car. He was a good patient, but very weak. I delivered him to the PWC Rehab Center in Morro Bay.

PWC’S MOST UNUSUAL RESCUE/TRANSPORT YET?

By Susan Tripp

I was riding my horse, Cisko, along with my friend, Judy, on the sandspit in Montana de Oro when we saw a cormorant stranded along the tideline. I called the PWC rescue line and left a message. I also called

Welcome New Members/Donors (Sept-Dec 2014)

Michele Abba
Dolores H. Adams & Paul Madsen
Luke Alexander
Ev Alpaugh
Shellee Anderson
John Armstrong
Carol Bader
Julie Bailey
Bernice Barbour
Virginia L. Bass
Colleen M. Beck
Raymond Blanco
Celene Bond
Marianna Borgstrom
Joanne Bradley
Dianne Brink
Barbara Burchell
Rita Burton
William A. Chilton
Kellie Christianson
Don Clutter
Charmaine & Clif Coimbra
Alice Cook
Nancy N. Cooley
Linda & Ray Cosma
Peggie & Jim Cox
Linda Crawford
David Crockett
Valeri Davis
Kurt Davis
Clifford Day
Charlotte Dietzel
Doug Drynan
James W. Duncan
Terre Dunivant
Mariam Eaton
Pam Erickson
Lois & David Fealey
Linda Field
Orchid Foo
Lois A. Gaines
Warren Gay
Ruth Gentry McMillan
Elisa & Tony George
Dorrene Gilmore
Patricia Golden
Michele Goodman
David Grady
Robbin & Robert Gross
Gary Gulli
Anita K. Hathway
Corrina Hogaboom
Teri Howard
Cheryle Inboden
Cynthia Jelinek
Tamira Jones
Esto & Larry Kandarian
Aidan Kelly
Laura & Thomas Kirschner
Arthur Kishiyama
Barbara Kuperman
Mary Langford McCrea
Jeffrey Lehmer
Frank Levine
Marcella Lindbery
Rhodie & Mitchell Lipari
Laurel & Ken Maas
Lawrence MacDonald & Natalia Calderon
Casey Martinez
Kathryn McAdams
McCollum & Associates
Anastasia & Christopher McGlothlin
Marty McLean
Margeri McNeill-Manning
Sarah L. Merril
Emily Miggins
Nancy Monroe
Betty & Fred Moritsch
Grant Morris
Vickie Mullins
Patricia Nolen
Patricia O’Leary
Megan O’Neill
Patricia Odum
Joan Palmieri
Kara Patman
Susan B. Pfau
Evelyn & John Pickering
Janine L. Raby
Debra Renick
Mary E. Risa Kaiser
Irene Rodarte & J. Tibbetts
Greg Rose
Maryna Roy
Joseph Schum
Fateme Shamsizadeh
Carol Shmitz Wise
Cristina & Lee Sirotta
Dena Smith, MD
Penny D. Smith
Herbert Sonnabend
Kellie Christianson
Gary Guliasi
Grant Morris
Adriane Walker-Bailey
Rita Burton
David Grady
Nancy Monroe
Marie Travers
Barbara Burchell
Michele Goodman
Emily Miggins
Shirley Thayer
Dianne Brink
Barbara Burchell
Nancy Monroe
Marie Travers

Educational Outreach

“Misty” PWC’s educational Western Screech Owl visiting the outdoor education program “Learning Among the Oaks” in Santa Margarita. Emma McAdams, a 6th grader in her second year of service as an Oak Ambassador, provides interesting and fascinating facts about owls to student attendees.

- Photo by Beverly Gingg

The PWC Education Team consists of these volunteer educators: Jen Roberts, Kathy Duncan, Dani Nicholson, Kelly Vanderheuvel, Virginia Flaherty, Tara Galanti, Claudia Duckworth, Karen Johnston, Jennifer Campbell, Marcelle Bakula & Terry Cook. This dedicated team provided 120 presentations last year to nearly 5,000 attendees and raised $9,000.00 toward the care and feeding of the 11 wildlife ambassadors. Thank you for educating students, teachers and the general public about our local wildlife and their habitat.

Photo – Virginia Flaherty with PWC ambassador Ms. Handsome, a Turkey Vulture (photo by Karen Johnston)

Spring Message

Spread the word! Keep the wild creatures in the wild by taking these precautions and spreading the word to neighbors & friends.

- Check trees & bushes for nests before trimming.
- Walk your property to look for ground nests before mowing, weed-whacking or leaf blowing.
- Baby deer need to be left where their mother has safely stashed them. Only if they wander around crying do they need assistance.
- You don’t need to feed orphaned or injured wildlife. They may be in shock and need veterinary assistance.
- Trapping wildlife in the spring often results in their young being orphaned.
Special Thank Yous

Bernice Barbor – Grant ($3000) for medications and supplements
Woods Family Foundation – Grant ($25,000) for Fund-our-Vet
Lilly Thayer – for creating ornaments and selling them to co-workers with proceeds to PWC
Animal Care Clinic, Dr. Tao – for their Wine Fundraiser which raised $3,000 for PWC
Marie Travers & Lucinda Adamson (Bird Ally X) - for their expertise & extra help at our Center
Sue Oberholzer – for the wine-themed Christmas Tree she created and donated at the Annual Christmas Tree Auction in Cambria (proceeds benefited PWC) - photo (right) by Marcelle Bakula

Membership/Donations Save Lives

“Yes, I would like to give wildlife a second chance!”

- Benefactor $2,500
- Patron $1,000
- Sponsor $500
- Contributor $250
- Supporter $100
- Advocate $50
- Student/Senior/Volunteer $25
- Year-End-Giving

I would like information on adding Pacific Wildlife Care to my will or trust.

Visit us online at www.pacificwildlifecare.org to set up a monthly subscription or pay by credit card

PWC’s mission is to support San Luis Obispo wildlife through rehabilitation and educational outreach. We envision a community aware of and responsive to wildlife and wildlife issues.