DIRECTOR’S MESSAGE

The winter months are always a fascinating time of year at the Center. The cooler weather brings us many species we don’t see year-round. Literally millions of birds follow the Pacific Flyway each year, the majority on their way to Central or South America. Many birds overwinter in the Bay Area, where the climate is fairly temperate. A few get into trouble as they arrive. That’s when we spring into action! Cedar Waxwings, robins and thrushes often gorge on fermented berries and fly into windows. Waterfowl such as grebes, herons, egrets and ducks are led astray from their coastal flight path during severe weather. Also commonly admitted to our hospital are first-year hawks that haven’t perfected their hunting skills and are not thriving. All need time (some just a few days and others longer-term) to recover in our wildlife hospital before they are released back to the wild to join their fellow feathered flocks and continue down the great avian highway.

From rabbits to raccoons, squirrels to skunks, mammals are no exception to our patient roster and we see a fair share of them as well in the winter months. Food sources often dry up and these four-legged creatures are on the move and sometimes more visible during this time of year as mating occurs in many species.

We’re busy gearing up for another ‘wild’ season; recruiting and training volunteers and interns, an integral part of our program, and getting prepared for the onslaught of babies in the early spring.

Our food expense alone last year was nearly $45,000. That figure doesn’t include medicines, veterinary and hospital care or any of the costly overhead associated with running a wildlife center such as ours. If you can help, even in a small way, it assures us that we’ll be able to continue to provide this important service to our community. Look online for our wish list of in-kind items that make a huge difference for the thousands of patients we see during the year. Without support from friends like you, we simply would not exist.

If you’d like to help in other ways, consider paying it forward by volunteering at the Center. Sign up on our website for an orientation class to get hands-on animal care experience, join our outreach or events team or help with administrative tasks in our office. All help is welcome and the rewards are plentiful!

We’re anticipating another exciting year at WCSV. We’re proud of our accomplishments, and look forward to serving our wildlife community, stronger and better than ever.

Janet Alexander
Director of Operations

Tracks...across the backyard, along a wooded trail, meandering by a creek. Whose tracks are they? Are they coming or going? Perhaps they are the tracks of things past, or of visions to be revealed, and stories yet untold. Come join us as we explore different dimensions of wildlife rehabilitation and the special wild neighbors with whom we share our communities. It is the intention of this publication to investigate our dynamic relationship with wildlife within the greater context of our relationship with the earth and each other. The issues are many, as are the myths, feelings, and beliefs surrounding each one. Let’s follow the tracks, wherever we may find them, and leave our own for those who may follow.
Despite the large human population of the Bay Area, we are fortunate to share our home with a variety of wildlife. One of the largest species—and most elusive—is the puma. They are adapted to live in a wide variety of habitats, including forest, prairie, desert, and alpine environments.

This ability to survive almost anywhere has allowed pumas to colonize a large geographic area, ranging from southern Alaska to the tip of South America. This extensive range has led to over 100 common names for the puma, including mountain lion, cougar, shadow cat, catamount, ghost cat, and panther.

The puma is an impressive cat by any name. They are able to leap up to 22 feet vertically, and jump 40 feet horizontally, due to their long and powerful hind limbs. Pumas are five to nine feet long, more than one-third of which is tail. They weigh between 60 and 200 pounds. Males are larger than females, and northern cats are larger than southern cats.

Each solitary cat roams a large territory averaging 40 to 80 square miles for females and 100 to 200 square miles for males. A male’s territory will overlap the territory of females. The only times pumas are found together is during mating, and while a female is raising young. Pumas can have up to six kittens per litter. The kittens will stay with their mother for up to two years.

When their eyes open at two weeks of age they are blue and change to the adult gold color at about one year. The kittens are born with spots that start to fade by six months of age. This is the only time that pumas have spots. When pumas mature, they have a white stomach and a solid-colored back ranging from light brown to cinnamon red or silver. In California, they are generally a tawny-brown.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife estimates 4,000 to 6,000 pumas statewide, with densities ranging from zero to ten cats per 100 square miles. This is considered a rough estimate as there has not been a robust statewide population study. In the Bay Area the Santa Cruz Puma Project (UC Santa Cruz) and the Bay Area Puma Project (Felidae Conservation Fund) are using remote cameras and radio collars to learn more about where the cats are living and how they are impacted by human development. Generally, the cats avoid people and attacks are rare; there have been only 15 verified attacks in the state during the last 30 years.

While attacks are rare, here are some tips to follow if you encounter a puma in the wild:

DO NOT turn your back, run, or approach the animal

DO make yourself larger and maintain eye contact

DO pick up small children

DO speak loudly and firmly

DO throw rocks, sticks, water bottles, etc. at a cat that is not otherwise deterred

Note: WCSV does not treat Mountain Lions.
**Nix the Netting to Keep Native Snakes Safe**

By Rachel Atkins

Garden netting is used to protect fruits, vegetables, or other edible plants from being eaten by wildlife. However, it has been found that netting is not a very good deterrent for deer, birds, squirrels or other animals. What’s more, if this soft plastic netting is placed improperly, loosely secured or stored in the open, it can be a serious hazard for animals. Snakes become entangled when they try to move through or hide under netting and it may tighten around them as they struggle to free themselves. They can die from dehydration, constriction injuries, or may be preyed upon by another animal.

If you find an entangled snake in need, first check that it is non-venomous. Rattlesnakes are venomous and have triangular-shaped heads with thick, dull bodies. They have a distinct rattle on the end of their tail, which they will sound when threatened. Gopher snakes are non-venomous and they have slender heads and shiny bodies. They may, however, mimic a rattle sound by vibrating their tails against dry leaves. If the snake is non-venomous, safely cut the netting around where the snake is trapped and bring the snake and netting to the Center for a thorough exam. We treat all native snakes in need. Contact us if you have trouble identifying or assisting a snake.

The best way to prevent snakes from becoming entangled is to not use netting. If you must use netting, select one that is rigid and can’t bunch up, or choose safer alternatives like chicken wire, grates or plastic coated wire. Fine mesh or frost cloths, designed to cover plants and protect them from insects, can also be used. These may deter other animals and pose little risk to snakes. Although many people are nervous or frightened of snakes, they actually benefit your garden by eating rodents and large insects that may destroy your plants. They are an all-natural rodent and pest control solution. Let’s keep our scaly friends safe!

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**Debbi Waterstone Legacy Advancing Wildlife Care**

By Ashley Kinney

Debbi Waterstone had a keen interest in the environment, conservation and especially in wildlife rehabilitation. She became a volunteer at the Center early in its history, where she cared for many species from ducks to fawns. Sadly, in 2007 Debbi was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Her last wish was to leave behind a legacy that would support her love of wildlife. After Debbi’s passing in 2009, her vision became a reality when the Debbi Waterstone Wildlife Foundation (DWWF) was started by her husband, Doug Agnew. The foundation is dedicated to supporting natural wildlife ecosystems by providing charitable funding to non-profit organizations.

While the DWWF has helped to support the Center for the last couple years, the foundation decided to gift the Center a larger grant in 2014 that will enable us to achieve several goals that we have had on our “to-do” list for a number of years. Below are just a few things this generous donation will allow us to purchase in order to improve the care of local wildlife:

**New medical equipment:**
- State-of-the-art blood chemistry and hematology analyzers for quick diagnosis of patients
- Compound trinocular microscope with camera
- X-ray exam table

**Better housing for animals:**
- Isolation runs for Bobcats, Coyotes, Gray Foxes and Raccoons while they recuperate
- New and improved pelagic and young bird enclosures for the indoor housing of ducklings and other waterbirds like egrets, grebes, herons and loons.

We are extremely grateful to have the support of the DWWF. This contribution will significantly increase our ability to diagnose and treat patients in the wildlife hospital.
**SOMETHING TO COO ABOUT**

By Alex Clements

Band-tailed Pigeons have seemingly dropped from the sky in staggering numbers this year. These large pigeons with blue-gray bodies, a white ring around the back of their necks and yellow beaks that end in a black tip are our only native pigeon. If you live in Los Gatos or Saratoga, you may have noticed tens or hundreds of Band-tailed Pigeons flocking to your backyard lately to feed on acorns produced by local oaks. They may be drawn to the Silicon Valley area because drought conditions have caused winter food sources in higher elevations to become scarce.

Unfortunately, when birds congregate at limited food and standing water sources, disease spreads quickly and can have a devastating effect on already declining populations. While these pigeons are not classified as endangered or even a species of special concern, they are listed on the latest State of the Birds watch list for birds in need of conservation action. They are also a close relative of the Passenger Pigeon whose extinction in 1914 spurred a wildlife conservation movement.

Near the start of the year, we began taking in record numbers of Band-tailed Pigeons described as weak, wobbly or puffed-up. On average, we receive only a dozen Band-tailed Pigeons a year, but this year we treated 52 of them by mid-February. After thorough examination, we quickly found that they were suffering from an outbreak of *Trichomonas gallinae*, a disease caused by a microscopic single-celled protozoan parasite. The disease is confirmed with a diagnostic test of the cheese-like lesions that develop in these birds’ mouths and throats. When the lesions become very severe, affected birds are unable to pass food through their throats and may have trouble breathing.

This avian-specific disease, called “trich” for short, is not new to the area. Every year, from time to time, we’ll care for pigeons, doves and predatory birds with symptoms of trich and we have been able to treat and successfully release many of these birds. Band-tailed Pigeons, however, may have less of an immunity to trich than their non-native counterparts.

Wildlife rehabilitation can go beyond being a medical care resource for sick and injured wildlife. By taking in Band-tailed Pigeons and collecting reports from the public, we’ve been able to contribute useful information to researchers studying the mortality of wildlife like these pigeons state-wide and broaden our understanding of the species as a whole.

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**TO OUR INVALUABLE PARTNERS IN SERVICE**

Dr. Rachel Boltz  
Dr. Tina Burling  
Ann Calnan  
Dr. Kate Cameron  
Jen Constantin  
Debbi Waterstone Wildlife Foundation  
Larry Krikava  
Dr. Kurt Nakamura  
Patagonia Palo Alto  
Dr. Emily Seymour  
Silicon Valley Cares  
Toyon Elementary School

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**GIFT AND ESTATE PLANNING**

A flexible and simple way to make a gift that benefits you and your loved ones as well as the wildlife that you care about.

Support the work of the Center and retain control of your assets during your lifetime. Create a legacy that reflects your values by making a bequest, name us as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy, or donate appreciated stocks, bonds, or mutual funds.

wcsv.org/how-to-help/estate
Like a whisper through the grasslands, hovering over marsh, scooping the wind with each beat, the Common Barn Owl flies in near silence. A stealthy, strictly nocturnal bird with a white underside and a chilling shrill call, Barn Owls have a reputation for seeming supernatural. Their almost soundless navigation is made possible, in part, by dense soft feathers all over their bodies that dampen the noise of their movement and fringed feathers at the edges of their wings that cut through air resistance and reduce turbulence.

The edges of their wings that cut through air resistance and reduce turbulence. Their quietude allows them to swoop within mere inches of unsuspecting mice and rats and heightens their other keen acoustic abilities to hone in on prey. Signature heart-shaped faces funnel sound to asymmetrically shaped, sized and positioned ears, allowing Barn Owls to pinpoint rodents rustling in the brush at great distances, out of sight or even in the dark.

Silent flight and good hearing are not the only adaptations that allow Barn Owls to be excellent hunters. It is also their ability to fly slowly or linger in the sky that gives them a competitive edge. Each wing has a high curvature allowing for better lift such that they need to flap their wings less often in order to glide through the air.

When a Barn Owl was found unable to fly in a neighborhood just outside of Santa Teresa County Park and brought to the Center on September 15, staff were tasked with identifying just what it was that was grounding the predatory bird so that they could make key life-saving decisions about its care. There are a variety of different reasons why a Barn Owl may be incapacitated. Many are victims of secondary poisoning when they eat poisoned rodents. Others encounter the dangers of living in urban areas when they are struck by cars, electrocuted on power lines or face a hard landing on concrete if they fall from tall trees as owlets. Whatever the cause, this adult male Barn Owl was bleeding from the nose and mouth and had what appeared to be a dropped left wing.

In addition to anti-inflammatory solutions and antibiotics to bring down the swelling around the wing, staff immediately administered pain medication to make this already stressful situation a little more tolerable. X-rays revealed not one, but multiple fractures to the owl’s ulna, the longest bone in a Barn Owl’s wing and part of the elbow that creates that special high curvature allowing Barn Owls to fly as they do.

It’s not always possible to fix a broken wing. A wild bird’s survival hinges on its ability to fly and fly well. Rehabilitation can be complicated by the type of fracture, number of fractures and where the fracture is located on the wing. Breaks too close to the joint may not be repairable and can cause lasting painful symptoms like bone infection and osteoporosis that greatly impact an animal’s quality of life.

Luckily, our veterinarian found that while there were multiple fractures on this bird’s wing, they were close to the center of the bone. There was hope for this owl. Staff specially wrapped the wing to stabilize the fractures, like a soft cast, and began the tireless work of supportive care for the owl.
Things were slow going for this bird in the beginning. At first, it was unable to perch well and was sitting weakly on the backs of its legs. After a medication regimen provided every day for a week and then again at the start of October, the bird began to show incredible signs of recovery. It was perching again, greeting caregivers with feisty lunges — a healthy sign for a wild predatory bird — and heartily eating a healthy natural diet. In fact, Barn Owls have a voracious appetite and families have been known to consume about 1,300 rats a year, making them incredibly beneficial to humans and the balance of our natural ecosystem.

The wing was unwrapped and rewrapped every few days. The healing process was reviewed and reviewed again until finally it was ready to be moved to a larger outdoor enclosure where it could regain strength in the injured wing. After over three months of care at the Center, the owl was placed in an oversized enclosure where we could observe the breadth of its hushed flight across 50 feet of open air. Needless to say, the Barn Owl’s flight was perfectly restored and we were able to return it to its home habitat on the yellow plains of Santa Teresa County Park.

Did you know that Barn Owls don’t make nests? They find existing cavities, ledges or buildings to line with the soft material from their regurgitated castings (or owl pellets) and lay their eggs inside. In our area, Barn Owls have been known to nest under the fronds atop tall palm trees. Barn owls can have up to 11 owlets, but generally have between one and three. They begin breeding in the first three months of the year, so you may see budding Barn Owl activity in your area by the time you read this. Last spring, we received six young owls that were orphaned from different spots in San Jose and Milpitas.

We’ve been working hard to keep wild Moms with their babies. When Barn Owls have become orphaned, volunteers on our Raptor Team who monitor local nesting boxes have been able to place owlets with existing families in the wild for a healthier start to life. If you find a young owl on the ground, give us a call. There may be something you can do where you are to reunite Mom with her babies. And, of course, if there is no possibility of putting Barn Owl families back together this spring, we’re open every day to give these marvelous creatures a second chance.

Interested in creating a safe habitat for Barn Owls in your area? Check out hungryowl.org/nesting-boxes.html for more information on setting up nesting boxes near you.
**PATIENT GALLERY** *Who’s on the mend at WCSV*

Luckily, the first baby Brush Rabbit of the year has a sibling to keep it company in rehabilitation. They were orphaned when found at a local school’s community garden.

This may be the first Ferruginous Hawk patient in the Center’s 22 year history. While it is the largest American hawk, the Ferruginous Hawk is rare to see in our area as it only spends its winters this far west and is typically found in open country. This hawk was hit in mid-air by a remote-controlled model airplane and spotted by none other than a birding group that was admiring the fascinating bird in flight in South San Jose. Despite its extraordinary stress at intake, it is now able to stand and recovering from a broken wing.

A duck of a different sort, the Common Goldeneye is not an everyday sight at the Center. This one was found wobbly and disoriented in the middle of a road in Saratoga and will likely be released by the time you read this.

They did not arrive together, but were both found orphaned on the ground on the same day. These juvenile Anna’s Hummingbirds are staying close together during rehabilitation.

You can tell that this is an adult male House Finch by its bright orange head and chest. It is standing on the edge of a dish of medicated water used to treat its eye infection.

The first orphaned animal to be taken into the Center this year was a one-week old Dusky-footed Woodrat that was caught by a cat. While this native rodent also has its eyes closed at this age, it has soft patches of fur and nearly transparent colored claws.
Covered from head to toe in oil at intake, the gull smelled suspiciously like French fries. We suspect that the substance grounding the waterbird was cooking oil. After about a month of treatment, including special baths, this gull is waterproof again and should be ready for release soon.

A pile of Pallid Bats arrived at the Center dehydrated, weak and bruised. The three bats perked up quite a bit after staff administered fluids and anti-inflammatory medication. Their large ears, which are roughly half the size of their entire bodies, distinguish them from other local bats.

Orphaned after being swept out of a chimney, these three Eastern Gray Squirrels are just one week old. At this brand new age, they are completely bald and pink with dark claws.

This Hermit Thrush, a common brown bird to spot in winter, was unable to perch until staff fashioned a special bandage that allowed it to gain strength in all the right places. Below, after physical therapy, it stands perfectly upright and even.

This Brown Pelican was found very skinny and unable to fly on a busy street in Los Gatos. It was ultimately transferred to International Bird Rescue for specialized pelagic bird care.
THE NOT SO PURPLE FINCH

While it’s not uncommon for us to take in hundreds of House Finches each year, we rarely see their close cousin, the Purple Finch. Their differences in body shape and color are subtle. One would think a Purple Finch would reflect the color of its namesake, but this misnomer is derived from its scientific name *Carpodactus pupureus*, which means crimson fruit-eater. In truth, there is not one purple feather to be found on the bird!

This season, we received several Purple Finches that required our care, two of which, a male and female, came in separately after hitting windows. Male Purple Finches have a more decadent rosy color that prominent ornithologist Roger Tory Peterson described as a “sparrow dipped in raspberry juice.” Females of the Pacific subspecies have an olive-brown tinge with more distinct lighter streaking on the face. Following pain medication and cage rest, they were successfully released.

THAYER’S GULL ENSNARED BY HOOK

We receive over a dozen birds caught in abandoned gear annually. An immature Thayer’s Gull was the latest victim to visit our wildlife hospital. It came in from Milpitas with a fishing hook caught in its nostril and left wing, veritably pinning its face to its body. Staff had to put the bird under anesthesia to safely remove the hook and treat the wounds. Over time, the gull gained strength and could fly laps around its enclosure. After two and a half months of care, it was released at a nearby pond where it quickly jetted out of its transport container and soared for several loops before landing and bathing in the water.

Saving local wildlife can be as simple as keeping track of fishing line, lures and hooks. Entanglement can make birds unable to fly, injure their legs and suspend them in trees. Grapples can cause internal damage when they are accidentally ingested. Long line fishing hooks are the biggest threat to albatrosses and other pelagic sea birds as baited hooks ensnare birds diving for food. The gear continues to fish long after the fisherman is gone. On a local scale, this type of ‘ghost fishing’ continues to affect local wildlife.

A RUSH ON THRUSHES!

Winter brings birds migrating from the Pacific Northwest as far as Alaska and Canada to the Bay Area. The secretive Varied Thrush finds its way to the forests locally and can be abundantly found around wooded areas of Saratoga and Los Gatos. Its distinctive rusty orange breast stands out against its black breast band and blue-gray back. We typically see just a few come into the Center by the latter months of the year, but saw a whopping 22 by the close of 2014! You may have noticed increased activity too.

The second to last patient of the year was a Varied Thrush like the one pictured below, and one of many that were healed here. After it was caught by a cat, the thrush was brought to a veterinary hospital in San Jose before it was transported to the Center where it could receive specialized care. It sustained punctures and bruising to its neck but was able to fly well. In less than a month’s time it was free again. Hopefully it will migrate back North for the summer to breed.

RELEASE HIGHLIGHTS

By Traci Tsukida

Male (top) and female (lower) Purple Finches

Thayer’s Gull with baited hook (top) and at release (lower)

Varied Thrush
Draw a line connecting the wild animal’s paw print on the left to the animal it belongs to on the right.

Answers: A. Bobcat  B. Raccoon  C. Coyote  D. Mallard  E. Opossum  F. Mourning Dove
If you see an animal in distress, find helpful information at:
wcsv.org or (408) 929-9453