

## Back to the Wild for AIWC's Beaver Buddies

*By J. Kaiser*

One brisk, sunny Friday morning in May, a caravan of AIWC staff and volunteers, staff from the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area (ASCCA), representatives from a number of local media outlets, and two very well-known North American beavers bounded along the rolling green hills of the ASCCA.

The morning did not start off without a hitch. The staff at ASCCA had previously selected a release site for AIWC's two beaver patients and had been preparing the location to become their new home, stocking the site with fresh aspen browse – a beaver favourite. This preparation turned out to be too good, however, and attracted the attention of a nearby wild beaver who quickly took up residence in the pond just before the arrival of AIWC's beaver patients. Because beavers are very territorial, as soon as ASCCA staff noticed the signs of a beaver already in the area, the plan was changed. The caravan clamored back into their vehicles and made their way to another pristine and secluded pond on the other side of the conservation area.

Everyone was present for a momentous event: the long-awaited return of AIWC's beaver patients to the wild.

Our female patient was admitted back in the summer of 2016, found alone on a Calgary golf course with a tail injury. She was cared for by AIWC staff as she grew up but was unable to be released until she was old enough, since beavers stay with their parents in the wild for at least two years.

Our male patient was admitted in the summer of 2017. He was a juvenile who was found trapped in a storm drain with serious injuries on his back. As his injuries healed, he was placed in an outdoor enclosure neighbouring our female beaver patient.

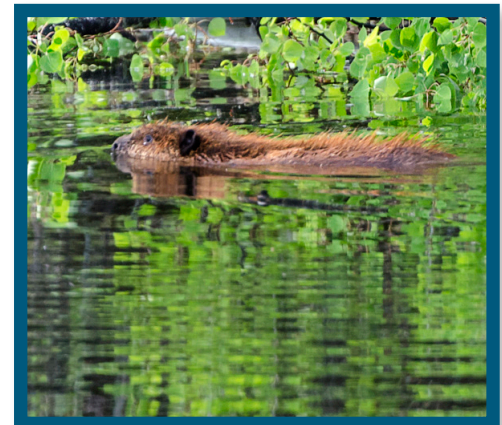
Despite our female beaver being completely disinterested in any prior neighbours, AIWC staff quickly noticed these two take an interest in each other, walking up and down their shared fence line. The decision was made to slowly introduce them, and they quickly hit it off. The bonded pair spent winter 2017-18 huddled together in a den they dug out in one of AIWC's outdoor enclosures.

The warmer spring weather meant that, after nearly two years in care for her (nearly an AIWC record!), and one year in care for him, it was finally time for the beavers to be returned to the wild where they belong.

Upon arrival at the final release site, AIWC staff moved quickly to unload the kennels near the water and let the beavers out as soon as possible. The female beaver was released first, quickly taking to the water and then reverting back to the shore, uncertain of her new surroundings. Moments later, the male beaver emerged from his carrier without hesitation, and gave a loud tail slap on the water as he



*Male beaver exploring his new home*



*Female beaver swimming*



*Beaver pair together in their new home*

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#### MISSION:

AIWC is committed to the rescue, rehabilitation, and release of injured and orphaned wildlife. We provide expert advice and education that fosters an appreciation of wildlife.

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## Update from the Executive Director

*By H. Duvall, Executive Director*

After an exceptionally long winter, summer is finally here and with it comes the return of migrant species and an abundance of baby wildlife!

Many injured adult animals are admitted to AIWC during our busy season, from May to August, but the most numerous cases admitted are of injured and/or orphaned baby wildlife. With the later start to spring, admissions of babies were up to 4 weeks later than usual - which worked in our favour, because it meant we had extra time to prepare for our busy season!

Summer is always a busy time at AIWC, and as such we plan and prepare each year to enlist extra help to support the Wildlife Rehabilitation Program in particular. This summer we are thrilled to have the continued support of our dedicated staff and volunteers, and the additional support from summer students and interns.

For the first time in AIWC's history, we are providing a rotation to a 4th year veterinary student from the University of Calgary. They will receive one-on-one training from our in-house veterinarian, Dr. Nicole Rose. As wildlife are often first dropped off at partnering veterinary clinics before coming to AIWC, we are so glad to have this opportunity and to help teach students crucial information about the needs of wildlife, which is often very different from domestic animals.

Like our Wildlife Rehabilitation Program, our Wildlife Education Program is similarly busy at this time of year. Over 1,900 people have already attended one of our programs so far this year. Through outreach programming, we're working to create strong co-existence between Albertans and wildlife.

So far in 2018, over 600 individual animals have been admitted into our care, and our busiest day to date saw 28 patients admitted in a single June day. One of the more unusual cases we recently admitted was a baby big brown bat (called a pup!). He came to us after he and several other bat pups had fallen out of their roost. The others were reclaimed by their mothers, but this little guy was left on his own. He will remain in our care until he is old enough to be released and returned to where he was found.

Without the support of our donors, we would not be able to realize our mission, and support the needs of wildlife like the little bat pup in care. Thank you for your continued and devoted support. We could not do it without you!

Sincerely,

Holly Duvall, Executive Director



*Formula feeding the big brown bat pup*





## ... Beaver Buddies continued from page 1

quickly took off.

Instantly, the male beaver swam a few laps around their new home as the bystanders looked on. This was natural behavior for a male beaver, as he checked for other beavers and predators in the area before returning to his companion. The two of them then sat together on the shoreline grooming as the caravan quietly faded away to leave them to their new surroundings.

AIWC is incredibly thankful for the help and support provided by ASCCA, and we couldn't have hoped for a better place for the beavers to be released. We are also incredibly lucky that ASCCA is able to monitor the beavers' progress in the wild and provide updates. After two months on their own, we know they are still doing well and staying together in the wild as a pair. The female beaver is not yet sexually mature, but if they continue to stay together, they could become a mating pair with offspring of their own.

Long-term patients such as these beavers require a lot of resources, from medication for injuries, to food, to fresh water for their pools, and dedicated care from AIWC staff.

But to be able to see patients thriving back in the wild makes it all worth it.

We thank everyone who has followed the stories of these two beavers over the past two years and supported their care. We couldn't do it without you!



*The beavers caught on a wildlife camera in June – they're sticking together and have taken down their first tree!*

*Photo credit to the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area.*

### WINTER HOURS

Effective August 18th, AIWC will be back to winter hours; open every day from **9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.** to admit wildlife in need of care.

For after-hours assistance, please refer to our website for more information:

[www.aiwc.ca/wildlife-hospital/after-hours-assistance/](http://www.aiwc.ca/wildlife-hospital/after-hours-assistance/)

### GO GREEN IN 2018!

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## AIWC has a new look!

For over two decades, a picture of Flash, a great horned owl and past patient at AIWC from the late '90s, has served as AIWC's logo.

It has been an honour to remember Flash in this way, and as we look ahead to AIWC's future, and celebrate 25 years of rescuing and rehabilitation wildlife in need, it is time for a new look!

Local graphic designer, Lilianne Khuong, reached out to AIWC and volunteered some great options to refresh AIWC's look and we're thrilled to reveal AIWC's new logo!

The new logo demonstrates the diversity in Alberta wildlife we admit for care on a daily basis and really puts a focus on AIWC's mission. Thank you, Lilianne, for your amazing work!



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FOR WILDLIFE  
CONSERVATION**



## Education Update: Nesting Geese Outreach Makes all the Difference

*By K. Jansen, Education and Community Engagement Coordinator*

Wildlife often behaves in ways that are not intuitive or easily understood by people; even for some of us who work with animals on a daily basis, animals can sometimes engage in behaviour that is unexpected to say the least! Educating people about these unexpected behaviours to prevent injuries and harm to the animals is a vital part of what we at AIWC do. Sometimes achieving this goal is a challenge, but on occasion, an outreach message goes further to assisting wildlife than we ever thought it could. One of these successful education campaigns happened just this spring and involved one of the most common urban wildlife species: the Canada goose.

When multi-story buildings are built in Calgary, it is unlikely that the builders anticipate how attractive these buildings will be as nesting locations for Canada geese; yet, that is exactly what happens! When nesting, geese will look for elevated areas with good sight-lines to defend their nests against predators, sometimes even heading up onto building roofs, balconies, and patios to do so. Once the goslings hatch, the parents then encourage the goslings to jump from the nesting site to the ground, and then walk their goslings to the nearest body of water, which can sometimes be up to a kilometre away.

Unfortunately for the geese, there are several issues with nesting on these seemingly convenient city buildings. Though goslings are able to jump from several stories without harming themselves, a jump of more than 4

stories can result in the goslings being injured when they land. Balcony railings can also be too much of a barrier for the little goslings, which can leave them dehydrated and stranded.



When situations like these arose in the past, AIWC dispatched volunteer rescue drivers to capture the entire goose family and relocate them to a safer site once the goslings had hatched; however, this is a very risky endeavour for all involved: the goose parents will sometimes abandon the young, injure themselves, or try to attack their rescuers! Keeping the goose family together and nesting in a safe location from the outset is far better for them, so this year we decided to focus on preventing issues before they started – and the response we received from the public was absolutely incredible.

The announcement AIWC made about preventing geese from nesting in inappropriate areas received an amazing amount of press coverage, with stories featured in on CBC, Global News, the Calgary Herald, the Rockyview Weekly, and several different radio stations, to name a few! The messaging about why geese choose to nest on buildings,

advice on putting up deterrents such as netting in April and May, and letting people know that the geese nesting three stories up would, in fact, be fine, was heard as far away as Vancouver, and people clearly were paying attention.

Nesting geese concerns and relocation requests used to be one of AIWC's most common spring inquiries from the public; in 2017, AIWC received an estimated 50 requests for goose families to be relocated. However, following our education efforts this year, we have only received 8 relocation calls! People truly took this issue to heart, and thanks to members of the public listening to this message and taking early preventative measures, more geese families are able to stay together and nest in safer locations.

Wildlife education makes a huge difference to the lives of the animals we all treasure. By sharing stories, facts, and spreading the word about AIWC, you too are helping to protect and care for Alberta's wildlife species!

For more information, to ask a question, or to report an animal in distress, you can call our Wildlife Hotline at 403-946-2361.





## There's Nothing 'Common' About These Ravens!

By J. Cooke

Some of the AIWC's most well-travelled patients flew in from out of town, but not using their own wings: four common raven nestlings were found in late April in the northern part of our province in need of rescue. Unfortunately, they were born in an area that was unsafe, and since the common raven is not a protected species like our migrating waterfowl, they were able to be removed from their nest to be placed in AIWC's care.



*Raven nestlings shortly after arriving at AIWC*

The four nestlings were transported to the Fort McMurray airport to be flown to AIWC. When first admitted, they required round-the-clock

monitoring from AIWC's dedicated staff, since young raven chicks require specialized treatment and frequent feedings. In order to prevent habituation to humans, whenever staff interacted with the raven chicks, they wore a special "raven" mask and mimicked feedings from a stuffed raven that also kept the nestlings company in their enclosure.

Ravens mature quickly – after less than two weeks in care, the youngsters were already leaving the nest. By the end of May, all four were able to fly around their outdoor enclosure. The young ravens had strong appetites and learned to self-feed very quickly, enjoying a varied diet of fruits, vegetables, and a wide variety of proteins. To provide enrichment and stimulate essential foraging skills, the ravens were provided puzzle boxes, buried worms, and had food hidden around their enclosure.

These clever corvids were the first wildlife babies admitted to AIWC in 2018, and in early July all four were released back to the wild, strong and healthy.



*The mask donned by staff while interacting with the ravens*



*Growing up fast!*



*Raven nestlings with "mum"*



*All grown up and in one of AIWC's outdoor enclosures just prior to being released*



## Swainson's Hawk Patient Update

By C. Bogstie

Known as overachievers in terms of migration distance, Alberta's Swainson's hawks make the trip to Argentina each year to spend the winter. The massive migration endeavour takes an average of two months and the Swainson's hawks are often seen combining with turkey vultures and other species of hawks to make kettles (group of migrating raptors) tens of thousands in size!

Admitted in August 2017, a Swainson's hawk found on the side of the road in NW Calgary is now residing in AIWC's outdoor runway building – the beginning of the final stages of rehabilitation for raptor species receiving care at AIWC! When he was found, the juvenile hawk was emaciated and showed signs of head trauma. Since he allowed his rescuers to get close enough to pick him up, it was a clear indication he was very injured, most likely suffering from a collision with a vehicle.

Due to extensive damage to his primary feathers and complete lack of tail feathers after his first molt, he had to be kept over the winter at the centre, since he would not have been able to make his long migration to South America. AIWC staff have been waiting for him to complete a second molt to improve his feather condition, and have been encouraging feather production through diet, and by misting him each day to promote preening.

After nearly a full year in care, he was able to fly one full lap of the runway and continued to improve rapidly. On July 11th, his recovery was finally complete, and everyone at AIWC was thrilled to see him released back to the wild where he belongs!



*Swainson's hawk exercising his wings*

## Sponsor an AIWC Patient: American Robin

By C. Vavasour-Williams

American Robins are widely distributed across North America; they are commonly spotted as far north as Alaska and as far south as central Mexico. Northern populations will migrate south to escape the harshest winter weather, while populations living further south are year-round residents. Here in Alberta, the return of the robin is regarded as one of the first signs of spring. Originally preferring wild deciduous woodland habitats, robins have become familiar residents of city parks, golf courses and backyards.

This robin fledgling was knocked out of the air by a domestic dog while learning how to fly in a residential backyard in Okotoks, Alberta. The concerned dog owner called AIWC and a rescue driver was sent to pick up the young robin.

Luckily, his examination revealed no injuries. He was placed in an outdoor enclosure with three other robin fledgling patients. Together, they will spend time learning how to fly and growing into healthy adult robins. Then, one warm summer morning, they will be released in a rural wooded area.

Sponsoring this robin, or any other current AIWC patient, helps with the costs directly associated with their care and rehabilitation. As part of your sponsorship, you will receive a certificate, a glossy 8x10 photograph of your patient, and a tax receipt for the full amount of the sponsorship. Thank you for helping us to keep them forever wild!



*American robin fledgling*



## Adorable, yet Feisty: Baby Red Squirrels

By C. Bogstie

Adorable, fluffy, chirpy, a bit nose-y - these are all descriptions often given to red squirrels, particularly this time of year when they are exceptionally



active in the early morning or late afternoon. Easily distinguished from other species of squirrels, these critters (as their name suggests) have reddish to reddish-grey coats on top with creamy white underbellies and chins.

While the red squirrel largely relies on pine and spruce cones as well as bark,

nuts, and seeds, they are also known to eat insects, eggs, mushrooms, and even mice and small birds. Their sweet appearance may suggest a passive existence, but this is not entirely the case. Red squirrels are known to be quite territorial and excessive chirps, tail twitching, and squeaking towards another squirrel suggests an argument is in progress.

In May of this year, a baby female squirrel estimated to be only four weeks old was admitted into AIWC's care after being found in someone's home. The same day, another, unrelated baby squirrel, approximately three weeks old, was also admitted. This second squirrel was found after an apple tree was cut down, sadly killing her two siblings.

Baby red squirrels do not open their eyes until they are four weeks old, and they are not weaned until they are at least seven weeks old. That means

these squirrels were two very fragile patients when they first came to AIWC, requiring regular formula feedings from staff.

However, they grew up quickly in each other's company, and were joined by a third red squirrel admitted to AIWC in June. Now all three are together in an outside enclosure preparing for their eventual release later this year!



*Baby red squirrel in outdoor enclosure*

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#### Your membership fee entitles you to:

- A mailed, paper copy of The Recovery Review, our quarterly newsletter;
- Our emailed ENews;
- Discount prices on select AIWC merchandise;
- Discounts at local businesses; and
- The opportunity to participate at the AIWC Annual General Meeting.

#### There are four easy ways to purchase or renew your membership:

- Complete and mail in the membership section of the insert attached;
- Complete the secure online form at [aiwc.ca](http://aiwc.ca); or
- Call 403-946-2361

The Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation (AIWC) plans to raise \$500,000 this year through fundraising campaigns and initiatives. It will cost the organization approximately \$25,000 to raise this amount. Funds raised will go to support AIWC's mission. For further information, please contact Holly Duvall, 403-946-2361.

## WILDLIFE HOTLINE: 403-946-2361

### Myth Busting: Skunks – Pest or Productive Neighbour?

*By J. Kozak*

Skunks: are they simply a smelly nuisance neighbor? Is their presence something to be feared? Can't they simply be moved to an area away from humans?

The striped skunk, *Mephitis mephitis*, is the species of skunk most commonly found in North America. Its appearance can't be mistaken; they are about the size of a domestic house cat, and their black fur and white stripe makes them easy to distinguish from other animals.

The skunk's reputation as a neighborhood pest is largely a misunderstanding. If you have a rodent or insect problem, the skunk's varied diet can make them a very welcome wild neighbor!

However, there is the matter of that pungent odour that they are known for. But fear not! Spraying is a skunk's last line of defense when they feel threatened or are protecting their young. Skunks will go through several stages of warning signs to alert the perceived threat before they spray, by stamping their feet, growling, hissing, raising their tail straight up, and twisting their hind end around to face the threat. When encountering a scared or threatened skunk, the best response is to back away slowly and quietly. Unfortunately, our house pets either don't notice or misinterpret these cues, which can sometimes lead our pets to return home with a newly acquired fragrance. However, because skunks only have a limited amount of scent, and it can take them a long time to replenish it, spraying is truly their last form of defense.

Why not just trap and relocate an unwelcome skunk? Simply put, when moved a short distance away, most animals, including skunks, will return to their established territory. Moving animals a great distance away puts them in unfamiliar territory without established resources, and can result in potential harm from other animals who already inhabit that area. Further, if you simply relocate the skunk, but do not make changes to the habitat that attracted them, a new skunk is likely to move in shortly. Trapping an adult skunk often separates a mom from her young, leading to orphaned skunk kits who will eventually emerge from the den, weak and hungry. This is the most common reason baby skunks are admitted to AIWC each summer, and AIWC has already admitted nearly 50 skunk kits so far in 2018!

As always, AIWC advocates peacefully coexisting alongside our wild neighbours, both urban and rural. Each species plays a key role in Alberta's ecosystem, and until threatened by a predator or domestic pet, a skunk can be a beneficial and harmless resident in any community - you might not even know they're there!



*Baby skunk huddles*

