

Recovery Review

Quarterly Bulletin of the Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation

Wildlife Conservation through Education & Rehabilitation

Nature's Pest Control Takes Over AIWC:

By D. Williams

Contrary to popular belief, finding a skunk living near your home truly makes you the luckiest on the block. With nature's pest control nearby, mice and wasps will be on the lookout and your yard will be free of the less desirable visitors!

To date, 85 striped skunks (*Mephitis mephitis*) have passed through AIWC's doors in 2016 alone. That's a jaw dropping increase of almost 300% from skunks admitted in 2014!

Naturally curious creatures with poor sight and a great sense of smell, skunks often find themselves in the strangest places, including at the bottom of a freshly dug post hole. Fortunately for that mud-caked kit, rescuers were able to pull him to safety.

His arrival at a local vet clinic, in transition to our wildlife hospital, prompted a request for a family of skunks to be removed from another Calgary yard. Upon explaining that skunks consume unwanted insects and mice, that they can be welcome help to gardeners, and that they would rather run away than fight (after all, after they spray, it can take them up to ten days to regenerate their scent glands, so they really only do it as a last resort when feeling threatened or scared), the family's relationship with the skunks transformed from fear and wariness to joyful skunk stories.

Though AIWC does not provide wildlife relocation services, we are often called to step in when those services are performed and orphaned baby animals are unknowingly left behind - certainly the reason for several of this summer's skunk kit patients.



A mud covered skunk kit caught in a post hole waiting to be rescued.

When it comes to moving or relocating, it is important to consider the animal's welfare. When moved a short distance, most animals, including skunks, will return to their established territory. When moved a greater distance, the newly introduced animal is at risk from other resident skunks, who may be aggressive toward the new comer. Relocating a mother and her young is even more dangerous. Introducing the mother and her kits into a habitat they are unfamiliar with

The Striped Skunk

means the animals have no established essentials at hand, such as water, a food source, and shelter. A mother may abandon her young in order to survive in her new surroundings. In all cases, unless changes have been made to the place where they were originally found, a new skunk may simply move in, taking over the open space created in relocation.

Over the years, public inquiries at AIWC have increased substantially, from those asking for assistance with orphaned or injured wildlife, to requests for removal of perceived "nuisance" wild neighbours. As the footprint of civilization and development expands, it sometimes



Skunk kit showing one of their classic defensive moves - when you see this stance it is a sign you are too close.



Just a few of our skunk patients enjoying dinner in their outdoor enclosure.

appears we lose touch of the need to cohabitate with wildlife, who occupied the space long before we did. But if we choose understanding instead of fear, we can learn to live alongside, and truly appreciate, our native wildlife.

Visit our website (www.aiwc.ca) to learn more about living together with skunks.



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UPDATES

VISION:

Every wild life matters.

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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to jennifer.kaiser@aiwc.ca.

Update from the Executive Director

By H. Duvall, Executive Director

As 2016 comes to a close, we look back on the past year and reflect on all the challenges and successes to help us plan ahead for 2017. In early September of this year, we admitted our 1,675th animal, which is the total number of animals we admitted in 2015.

This year has brought a huge increase in the numbers of animals admitted to our centre. We attribute some of this to more awareness about our organization, but also because human/animal encounters and conflicts are rising.

One of the most frequent admissions we saw in 2016 was striped skunks. This past summer we saw a huge increase in the amount of striped skunks admitted to AIWC. In 2016, we have seen almost three times as many skunks as we did in 2014.

AIWC encourages learning how to cohabitate peacefully with skunks, and one of several ways we are doing this is through the recent publication of AIWC's first children's book: *Scared Skunk*. In this true story, *Scared Skunk* shares her struggles about the loss of her mom, and an encounter with litter that leads her to the help she desperately needs. *Scared Skunk* makes a great, educational gift that will help spread awareness about striped skunks and the many challenges they face.

As our patient numbers increase, it is crucial that not only do we have the funding to support the demand, but also the staff and volunteers to care for wildlife in need. This summer we were extremely lucky to have an amazing team of summer students and interns. Thank you to Shannon, Erica, Erin, Sabrina, Breanne, and Courtney for your exceptional dedication and hard work! Thank you!

A huge thank you also goes to our volunteers who were crucial in our operations this summer. Already over 5,000 hours have been donated by our volunteers. Thank you!

As the demand for all our services increase, so does the pressure to ensure funding to keep AIWC operational now and in the future. Thank you to all of the outstanding individuals, corporations, and foundations who generously contribute crucial funds to directly help wildlife.

It all comes down to this:

"We don't own the earth. We are the earth's caretakers. We take care of it and all the things on it. And when we're done with it, it should be left better than we found it."

Katherine Hannigan, author



THE HOUSE FINCH: *Haemorhous mexicanus*

By C. Vavasour-Williams

This juvenile house finch was admitted to AIWC on September 24, 2016 after having been attacked by a cat. Upon examination, it was discovered that the finch was missing all of his tail feathers, as well as some body feathers.

The finch had also suffered some bruising; however, he luckily had not sustained any puncture wounds or lesions as a result of the attack. It is important to remember, however, that even if the bird is not wounded, contact with the saliva from a domestic cat - and the bacteria found in that saliva - can still be fatal for birds. The victims of cat attacks are still admitted for care so that they can receive the proper preventative medication to avoid any potential infections.

This finch remained in care until his feathers grew in and was one again able to fly. He was released back to the wild in mid-October.



House finch recovering from his injuries

The house finch is a bird in the finch family, and was originally only a resident of Mexico and the southwestern United States. In the 1940s, however, the species was introduced to eastern North America.

House finches are most commonly found living in urban spotted near buildings, residential homes, golf courses, city parks and are frequent visitors to backyard bird feeders. These finches are mainly permanent residents throughout their range, although some northern populations will migrate a short distance south to escape the harshest winter weather.

House finches feed nearly exclusively on plant materials; a variety of seeds, buds, and fruits are preferred items. These finches will feed on mustard seeds, thistle, and poison oak. When fruit is available, house finches will eat cherries, apricots, peaches, pears, strawberries, and blackberries.

Black oil sunflower seeds are the preferred item at backyard bird feeders.

These finches are permanent residents in most of their habitat, so if the winter is mild, keep an eye out for these colourful songbirds year-round!



Adoption Option

This northern saw-whet owl was admitted in September after suffering injuries associated with blunt trauma to her eye and left wing. After weeks of care, her wing continues to heal well and show signs of improvement, and her eye is almost back to normal. This is one of four northern saw-whet owls AIWC has admitted for care so far this fall!

Adopting this owl, or any of our other patients, help with the costs associated with their care and rehabilitation. As a part of your adoption, you will receive an adoption certificate, a glossy 8x10 photograph of your patient, and a tax receipt for the full

amount of the adoption. For more details and to adopt, visit us online at aiwc.ca/support-us/adopt-an-animal or call 403-946-2361.

Make A Donation And DOUBLE IT!

Your donation can help an animal in need; your company's donation can help another! Many companies offer donation matching programs for their employees and often all that is required is a donation receipt from you. To inquire if your company has such a policy, please check with your human resources department.

Every dollar helps!

Education Update: Shedding Light on Skunks with the Chevron Retirees Association

By K. Jansen, Education and Community Engagement Coordinator

Though education programs are typically thought to be geared towards children, we here at AIWC have found that learning about wildlife is exciting and useful for people of all ages. For instance, AIWC was recently invited to do a special presentation for the Chevron Retirees Association. The group organizers, Jan Ford and Bert Helden, are passionate wildlife advocates, and wanted to share their love of wildlife and AIWC with their peers. Our board members Katherine Pederson and Ted Gilson were on hand to deliver a short presentation to the Retirees Association on wildlife rescue, and to introduce the event's special guest: Gulliver the striped skunk.

During the presentation, Katherine shared Gulliver's story about coming to AIWC as a very young orphan. Despite all attempts to integrate him with the other skunks in care, Gulliver was too friendly with humans, making him an unsuitable candidate for release. After exhaustive testing, however, AIWC staff determined



Board member Katherine Pederson speaking to the Chevron Retirees Association about the benefits of skunks.



Gulliver, our Education Ambassador

that Gulliver's friendliness could be a useful tool in debunking the many myths surrounding skunks. His ability to alleviate people's fears was on full display during the presentation; in spite of the fact that many members of the group disliked, or even were afraid of skunks, several of the program participants got up out of their seats to get a closer look at AIWC's education ambassador!

It is never too late to learn more about wildlife and how you can help them. If you are interested in booking an AIWC Education Program for a classroom or group, call (403) 946-2361 or email education@aiwc.ca. More information on the types of programs we offer can be found at <http://www.aiwc.ca/education/topics>.

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AIWC'S LATEST NEWS

by reading our blog!

<http://www.aiwc.ca/news-and-events/blog/>

AND follow us on Facebook,

Instagram (@albertawildlife) & Twitter (@AIWC)



Patient Profile: American Coot

By J. Kozak



American Coot in her outdoor enclosure

Is it a duck? A goose? Why no, it is a coot!

She (or he; sex has not been determined at this time) was admitted to AIWC on September 3rd. She was located on the porch area of a business in north east Calgary where she had spent several days before being rescued. Preliminary examination determined that she was underweight, suffering from an injured eye, and unable to fly.

While the coot may often be mistaken for a type of duck, coots are, in fact, more closely related to the sandhill crane. Rather than having webbed feet like a duck, each toe has a broad lobe of skin that assists them in kicking through the water. Other identifying features are their grayish-black body and white bill when fully matured.

The habitat of the coot consists of a range of freshwater wetlands, where they find an abundant amount of aquatic plants, their primary food source. Sometimes they will take to land, where they will pick at grains or leaves of trees. They will occasionally eat insects and worms, which are a specific favourite of this coot patient!

Approaching the winter months, you can usually find coots dispersed amongst flocks of other waterfowl, occasionally numbering in the thousands, as they migrate south.

At present, this patient has been enjoying her recovery time in AIWC's outdoor waterfowl area, and will remain in care until able to fly on her own. If she is unable to be released prior to migration, she will over-winter at the centre.

This Holiday Season Give the Gift of Helping Wildlife!

We have a variety of gift options for your wildlife-loving friends and family members! And your donation ensures we can continue to provide orphaned or injured wildlife with a second chance.

- **Adopt an animal.** Gift recipients will receive a colour photo of their adopted animal and an adoption certificate. Order by December 10 to ensure gifts arrive by the holidays!
- **Donate in Memory or Recognition.** Donations can be mailed to us or made online through our website and CanadaHelps. Visit www.aiwc.ca for more information.
- **Purchase a 2017 Calendar, Christmas Cards, or your own copy of the children's book, *Scared Skunk*.** See the insert to this edition for more information and to purchase.
- **Become a Member or Gift a Membership to a Loved One.** Benefits include receiving our quarterly newsletter and discounts on AIWC merchandise and at local businesses.

Thank you! Your continued support ensures we can serve
Calgary and southern Alberta for years to come!

FAQ

What to do if you find an amphibian or reptile in the fall or winter

By K. Pederson

Alberta is home to two salamander species, eight species of frogs and toads, as well as seven species of snakes. As the temperatures start to drop in the fall, reptiles will seek their winter resting spots (hibernacula): a place that stays just above the freezing point. They prefer to den in rocky outcrops, animal burrows or other subterranean areas, but will also use man-made rock piles, water wells or even cellars.

Amphibians will also seek a place that remains slightly above freezing as they pass the winter months in a state of dormancy, or torpor. Some prefer muddy burrows found at the bottom of ponds, and some will spend the season underwater. Frogs have the special ability to produce enough glucose in their bodies (which acts as an anti-freeze) to protect their vital organs in freezing weather; which means they are able to over-winter in less sheltered areas such as under a pile of leaves or under a log.

In autumn, you may find snakes, salamanders or frogs on foot paths or roads as they make their way to their winter home and they don't generally need our help - they know where they are going!

However, if the animal is observed in a high traffic area, such as a bike path, you can help by moving them to a safer spot, facing in the same direction they were headed.

If you must move an amphibian, never handle them with bare hands. Many species have very absorbent skin, and the oils and salts on our skin can seriously harm them.

You can encourage a snake to move off roads or paths by gently nudging them with a long stick. The exception, of course, is the Prairie rattlesnake.

If you observe any injuries in our amphibious friends, or find one after the lakes and ground have frozen solid, please call AIWC (403-946-2361) for correct species identification, proper handling protocol, and to help arrange a rescue if needed!



Garter Snake



Spotted frog



Tiger salamander, admitted to AIWC in July 2016 after being found and kept as a pet

FAWNING OVER FAWNS

This season, AIWC has three beautiful fawns in our care: one mule deer fawn and two white tailed deer fawns. They all came to us from different areas of Alberta, but all were in need of care because they had each become orphaned and were too young and weak to be on their own.

In the case of the mule deer fawn, he was found trapped in a fence on a property south of Calgary, sustained injuries, and did not have a mother in sight. The white tailed deer fawns each came in orphaned - the most

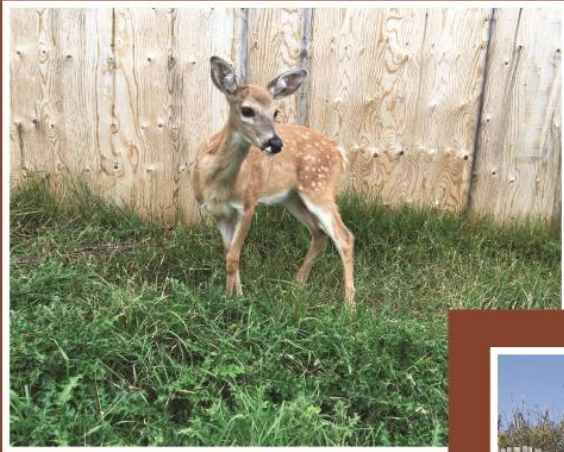
By T. Collins

likely causes being natural predators or an accident with a vehicle.

The best news of all is that all three of these fawns improved quickly once in care. They share a large outdoor enclosure where they are protected from predators. You could even say these orphaned fawns found a new family with each other!



One of our white-tail deer fawn patients at AIWC in an indoor enclosure shortly after being admitted, and then later in the large outdoor enclosure where they will over-winter.



They are set to be released once winter has come and gone; Alberta is expecting an exceptionally cold winter, and these young fawns will have a better chance of survival if they over-winter at AIWC and return to the wild in the spring. In the meantime, they are growing up, losing their spots (did you know that a fawn's spots fade when they grow in their winter coat? So fawns born earlier in the season will have their spots longer than those born in late spring!), and naturally adapting to the season changes.



Why are white-tailed deer called 'white-tail'? Their bellies are white all the way to the tip of their tails and you can only see it when that tail darts up. When their tails are 'flagged' upward, the white colour and motions are used to warn others of danger.



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MYTH BUSTING:

BECOME A MEMBER OF AIWC

By purchasing an annual membership, you support local wildlife, conservation, and education at AIWC for a yearly fee of \$35 per person or \$45 for a family. All new and renewed memberships will be valid until March 21, 2017.

Your membership entitles you to:

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

Here are four ways to renew/purchase memberships:

- Complete and mail in the membership section of the insert enclosed
- Complete the secure online form at aiwc.ca
- E-mail membership@aiwc.ca
- Call 403-946-2361

GO GREEN FOR 2016!

Receive the Recovery Review straight to your inbox, saving paper and postage!

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AIWC's Winter Hours

Every Day 9:00am - 5:00pm

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

<http://www.aiwc.ca/wildlife-hospital/after-hours-assistance/>

Feeding Wild Birds

By J. Cooke

Many of us enjoy the daily sightings of wild birds that flock to our yard when we put up a feeder. Many people worry, however, that once they begin feeding the birds, they

must continue to provide a steady source of food or the birds will starve because they have become habituated to this human-supplied food source. We are happy to report that this is a bird-feeding myth!

Although you may see the same birds coming to your feeder out of convenience, the truth is that they have many wild food sources available to them. In fact, some studies show that wild birds obtain an average of 75% of their food from sources other than feeders.

It is also not true that feeding birds will prevent them from continuing with their normal migration. Songbirds that migrate to southern climates rely on instinct, hormones, and other factors such as weather patterns and hours of daylight to signal their time for migration. Though, as they move through our area, feeders may provide a source of convenient energy for their long journey, especially where loss of habitat has become an issue.

Another persistent myth is that there is no benefit to feeding the birds at all in the summer, since natural food sources are abundant. Although the parents can certainly feed their hungry hatchlings without visiting your bird feeder, this is actually the time of the year when easy access to nutritious food can make life a little more manageable for them. Some studies have even shown that backyard bird feeders have a positive effect on reproductive success and the replacement of feathers during moulting.

Finally, during the winter months, it is possible that the sudden disappearance of feeder food could cause hardship for resident birds during periods of extreme cold, snow, or ice - though there haven't been enough studies on this to know for sure.

In any case, weather patterns and the abundance of natural food supplies such as berries, seeds, and insects cause birds to shift ranges, and the abundance of human-supplied food is unlikely to affect these trends, so don't let myths prevent you from experiencing the joys of a backyard bird feeder!



Fledgling American robins

WILDLIFE HOTLINE: 403-946-2361