

RecoveryReview



Quarterly Bulletin of the Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation

Wildlife Conservation through Education & Rehabilitation

AIWC Has A Permanent Home!

Since 1993, AIWC has called our current location "home", but, as you may know, the centre has been in residential limbo for the past several years, deciding whether we have to move to a new location or purchase the land we currently reside on.

Now that uncertainty is over. We are thrilled to announce that AIWC has purchased the property we're currently on; we have a forever home, and do not have to move!

With the help of one extremely generous private donor, we have \$200,000 in place towards the purchase of the land; but we still need to raise a further \$550,000 to purchase the property in full, since we have arranged a mortgage through the Nickle Family Foundation. The same private donor has also agreed to match funding up to an additional

\$250,000, so - with your help - we hope to meet this goal.

We are launching a capital campaign to be mortgage-free by the end of 2015. In addition to these funds, AIWC still needs to raise our necessary operating funds so we can continue to help over 1,600 injured and abandoned wild animals annually.

Each year, demand for our services increases and it is only with your help that we can hope to meet the needs of our wild patients for years to come – all at our now permanent home, northwest of Airdrie.

Please consider donating today. Any amount helps ensure that the Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation will continue to help wildlife in need and provide them with the care they so richly deserve to

stay forever wild.

Donations can be mailed to the centre or made directly online through our crowd funding campaign website: <http://aiwcforeverhome.causevox.com>.

And now that AIWC has a forever home, we can finally use a \$100,000 grant we received in 2013 to build a state-of-the-art mammal enclosure. We are excited to now be able to expand and enhance our facility to better meet the needs of our patients!

We thank you for your continued support and help reaching our fundraising goals! We are so happy to finally have a home of our own, and we look forward to our bright future ahead.

Thank you!

~ H. Duvall, Executive Director



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www.aiwc.ca

VISION: AIWC strives to enrich the lives of Albertans by nurturing a strong appreciation and respect for wildlife.

MISSION/MANDATE:

To contribute to wildlife conservation in Alberta by:

- Providing comprehensive and humane rehabilitation programs for injured and orphaned wildlife;
- Promoting awareness and encouraging greater stewardship of native wildlife through engaging education programs;
- Researching wildlife issues that improve rehabilitation protocols and support the broader scientific community; and
- Helping people co-exist peacefully with wildlife by providing humane solutions for wildlife 'invasions' on personal and public property.

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Submissions/comments may be sent to the above address.

Meet Our Wildlife Ambassadors

~ by J. Cooke

The education team at AIWC works to generate excitement and awareness about wildlife, our natural environment and our role in it. Without a doubt, the two members of our team who generate the most excitement with children (apologies to our human team members!) are Griffin, our red-tailed hawk, and Gulliver (a.k.a. Gully), the striped skunk.



Griffin came to AIWC in 2013 with a head injury, which was likely sustained in a collision with a car. The accident left him blind in one eye and very docile, so he was not a candidate to be returned to the wild, but he has become a great educational ambassador. Griffin is a striking bird, with unusual, darkly tinged plumage. In the mornings he flies to his perch in the lofty ceiling of AIWC and entertains staff and volunteers

with his morning routine of wing stretches and little hops, while uttering what one volunteer described as "pterodactyl" shrieks. He is fed a diet of mice. On the day this writer visited, he calmly entered his traveling crate for a trip to a local senior's home. He also goes to schools as well as visits Scouts and Guides groups, where he spends time out of his crate so the children can observe him.

AIWC's other animal ambassador is a two-year-old skunk named Gulliver. He was found outside of a Calgary yoga studio as a baby and would normally have been rehabilitated, however he was unusually calm and far too people-oriented to be successfully released back into the wild. Gully is playful and enjoys going for supervised walks outside on AIWC property where he digs and explores. A misunderstood creature, skunks have adapted well to urban life and can actually be very helpful in the garden because they eat insects and rodents. They are not aggressive and will spray only if scared. Since he has been de-glanded, Gully safely attends all manners of educational sessions, during which he stays in his enclosure, allowing kids to observe him snacking on treats such as sweet potato.

AIWC offers a wide variety of programs tailored to different age groups, including What's in Your



Backyard, Wildlife Rescue, Birds of Prey, and even Supremely Skunks. These programs provide valuable knowledge about our wild neighbours for future generations, and would not be possible without your support. Our treasured ambassadors, Gulliver and Griffin, will be with us for life, and your donations also help us feed and care for them each day.

Please Do Not Disturb

~ by T. Taylor

Ahhh... spring at last! The season of growth and renewal. Our daylight hours grow and nature lovers everywhere watch for the tell-tale signs of its arrival. Spring delights all of our senses as the sights and sounds of nature change and intensify.

Spring also heralds the arrival of the busy season at the Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation (AIWC). Providing a second chance for many injured or orphaned wild animals are three full-time clinic staff, summer students, and interns from May through mid-September, and numerous volunteers. Throughout the summer, the cages will be full and those who care for them will be hard at work.

However, in the spring, many animals brought to the centre are actually not at all injured; instead they are presumed orphaned and are needlessly removed from their parents by finders with the best intentions. Unfortunately for these young animals, a misreading of perfectly natural circumstances can find them separated from their parents (where they truly have the best chance of survival), ending up in AIWC's care.

Let's take a look at what this looks like for some of the more frequent victims of well-intentioned kidnapping.

Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) and white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) are commonly found throughout southern Alberta. One or two spotted fawns are born to



each doe in the spring. The fawn's coat is covered in white spots, as their main defense against predators is to hide. The doe forages in the vicinity returning to feed or move her youngster until it is mature enough to outrun danger beside her. This means young fawns are frequently left alone, hiding, for long periods – sometimes up to 24 hours at a time.

Three species of rabbits are native to Alberta: the mountain cottontail (*Sylvilagus nuttallii*), snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*) and the white-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus townsendii*). Two to seven babies are generally born in a litter, which the mother leaves for long periods of times so she doesn't attract predators to them (her newborns are scent-less). She nurses her litter for about 5 minutes in the early morning



and again at night. This is normal rabbit behavior. Heartbreakingly low statistics show that once removed from their mothers - even when cared for by experts - the great majority of young rabbits will not survive.

Most birds admitted to AIWC are unfortunately due to altercations with humans, such as when nests are built in unwanted areas and removed by property owners. Fledglings that have recently left their nests are often mistaken

see **Do Not Disturb** continued on p. 6

Myth Busting

~ by J. Kozak

Parental Abandonment At The Slightest Human Touch?

During this edition of Myth Busting, I tackle the myth that a human making direct contact with an egg or baby bird will cause the parents to abandon it.



I'm sure many of you have been told this at some point in your life. Well, it turns out that this is simply not true.

The myth stems from the belief that birds can detect human scent. As it turns out, birds have relatively small and simple olfactory nerves, which limit their sense of smell. There are some species that have more advanced nerves, but these serve for specialized purposes.

If you find an uninjured nestling that has fallen out of its nest, all you have to do to help is place it back in the nest. If the nest is out of reach, you can make a new one using a small container (like a margarine container), with a hole in the bottom to allow water to drain out the bottom. Place the bird and the new nest back into the tree. The parents will make the

effort to feed the nestlings in both the new and old nest.

Once matured to the fledgling stage, the baby birds will leave the nest, learning and practicing the art of flight. Their parents keep close watch during this stage, so we need not interfere if a fledgling bird is found on the ground.

Expanding to other animal species shows that this myth remains just that - a myth. Squirrels, for example, will relocate their offspring if there is a potential threat nearby, but will not abandon them if they are interfered with.

However, if you accidentally disturb a nest, there is a way to tell if the nest and young birds have been abandoned: using

grass or small twigs, make an 'X' to cover the nest. Check back with the nest over the following couple of days to ensure your 'X' has been disturbed and that the mother has returned to care for her young.

If you do find a young animal you fear has been abandoned, you do not need to worry that your presence or scent will cause the parents to orphan their offspring - it is just a myth. The truth is, baby animals have the best chance of survival when left with their natural parents, even if we do a quick check-in.

If you find what you believe is an injured or orphaned animal, please call our wildlife hotline at 403-946-2361 before removing them. AIWC staff can ensure that the animal is, in fact, orphaned and can help prevent accidental kidnappings.

A Menagerie of Muskrats

~ by K. Strobel Scatolin

Winter can pose serious problems for muskrats. They are small and do not hibernate or store food. To share heat and save energy during this time of the year, several muskrats may huddle together in a warm, dry nest. Young muskrats disperse from their families to new areas just before winter, and become vulnerable to predators and human disruptions, especially when they find poor habitat to live in.

AIWC became a warm and safe home for six young muskrats (*Ondatra zibethicus*) this winter - certainly an unusually large number of muskrats to over-winter at the centre. Members of the public found them displaced in Calgary, Cochrane, and Airdrie.

Examinations found some of the muskrats were under-weight, and had a few wounds, and one of them even had broken incisors.

In the months following their admissions, each muskrat resided in their own individual



Six muskrats were found displaced and debilitated in the Calgary region this winter. They spent the rest of the season safe and healthy at AIWC while waiting for their spring release back to nature.

enclosures with indoor pools, each receiving proper meals daily, including nuts, corn, yam, and other fresh vegetables, and the injured teeth are growing back again. AIWC staff tracked their health and nutrition progress so they were strong and healthy for their release back to the wild in April.

AIWC found each muskrat a new habitat for release; the most suitable areas are wetlands with a low existing population of animals.

In the wild, muskrats play an important role in their ecosystem. Many other animals, such as ducks and turtles, use muskrat lodges built of mud and plant material as nesting, resting, or even as their own

see **Muskrats** continued on p. 6

AIWC Staff attend International Conferences

~ by S. Jespersen

Workshops, seminars and field trips, oh my! As always, the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (NWRA) conference did not disappoint. This year, the Mercer County Wildlife Centre of Princeton, New Jersey hosted the event that provided over 130 hours of lectures and hands-on learning for wildlife rehabilitators across North America.

AIWC's Director of Wildlife Care, Stacey Jespersen was fortunate to attend lecture sessions dealing with topics such as disaster planning, veterinary treatment techniques and waterfowl rehabilitation. The new information gathered in these lectures will be used to improve the care of AIWC patients at the wildlife trauma centre.

International wildlife rehabilitation conferences are essential for the sharing of species information and for the enhancement of individual rehabilitation centres' animal care protocols. Since the majority of wildlife rehabilitation centres are charitable organizations, most staff and volunteers do not have access to adequate funding for continuing education. Conference events provide

learning opportunities that are not readily available to wildlife rehabilitators and most importantly, they are provided at a reduced cost. Conferences also give the wildlife rehabilitation community the excellent opportunity to network and collaborate with others.

The theme of the 2015 NWRA symposium, 'Success Takes a Village', was a humble reminder that wildlife rehabilitation does not simply involve the physical rehabilitation of individual animals, but rather a network of animal enthusiasts all doing their part to help our native wildlife. Wildlife rehabilitation is a combined effort between donors, organizational members, finders, countless volunteers, wildlife biologists, and veterinarians.

Without donors and members, AIWC could not finance the care of our wild patients. Without the dedication and perseverance of those finding



Clinical diagnostics seminar at the NWRA 2015 symposium.

injured and orphaned wildlife, patients would never come into AIWC's care. Without the daily efforts of volunteers, biologists and veterinarians, the patients would not receive the exceptional care they deserve.

All of the techniques and information gathered at the NWRA 2015 symposium, made the trip to New Jersey absolutely invaluable to AIWC's animal care program. Staff are eagerly looking forward to attending in 2016!



In early March, AIWC sent two of its newer staff members, Skye Burgan and Katie Dundon, to Edmonton for the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (IWRC's) Basic Wildlife Rehabilitation course, hosted by the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton (WRSE).

IWRC is a non-profit council, founded in 1972, that provides education and resources for wildlife rehabilitators worldwide. Its Basic Wildlife Rehabilitation course was the first of its kind when it was launched in 1984. Since then it has been delivered to wildlife groups in 11 different countries and is regularly hosted in the United States and Canada each year.

The two-day course includes a combination of lectures and lab work, providing attendees information on anatomy, nutrition, and zoonoses, as well as hands-on practice for giving physical examinations, animal handling and restraint, and care skills such as giving injections.

Though the course presents introductory level knowledge, it also provided AIWC staff the excellent opportunity to network with rehabilitators and volunteers from other parts of Canada, as well as a great refresher and update on Alberta wildlife rehabilitation permits and regulations.

Seeing the value this course would have with AIWC's own volunteers, the centre is now hoping to host IWRC's Basic Wildlife Rehabilitation

course later this year. If presented, the course would be open not only to AIWC volunteers, but also anyone else interested in learning the basics of wildlife rehabilitation. Though there is a cost to attend, AIWC would not see any financial gain from hosting; however, the benefit in having well-trained and up-to-date staff, students, and volunteers is immeasurable to both the centre and our patients.

Without the support of our generous contributors, continuing education opportunities for our staff and volunteers would not be possible – thank you for your donations!

If you are interested in attending, stay tuned to AIWC updates on social media for further information and potential dates.

Muskrats *continued from p. 4*

residences. Muskrats also play a crucial role in managing marsh habitats: they graze on vegetation, remove excess plants, and make sure waterways are clear. Like beavers, they are often referred to as engineers of the environment as they influence the composition of local plant communities. These semi-aquatic



rodents are very abundant in certain areas, making them important prey animals for predators.

AIWC would like to thank all of our valuable volunteers, donors, and supporters who help us with the time and cost associated with the daily care of these little muskrats. If you have not yet had the opportunity to donate, we encourage you to take a moment and help us by accessing the web site: www.aiwc.ca.

Do Not Disturb *continued from p. 3*

for being orphaned and are usually a similar size to their parents. Youngsters are unable to fly very well and may be found in strange places. More than likely, their parents are a safe distance away watching and waiting for you to move away to continue feeding their young. Once in AIWC's care, nestling and fledgling birds require significant time and resources, depending on regular feedings as often as every 20 minutes throughout the day.

AIWC operates on limited resources and funds and relies on grants and donations to cover most expenses. Please take the time to evaluate the situation before handling any wildlife; in most cases, it is in everyone's best interest to avoid bringing in what we perceive to be orphaned. It is always best to contact a rehabilitator with any questions first. Staff members and volunteers are only a phone call away: (403) 946-2361.

Wildlife Cruelty Bulletin

~ by N. Martel

Acts of cruelty directed at wildlife are unfortunately nothing new. *The Criminal Code of Canada* defines animal cruelty as any wilful act that causes unnecessary pain, suffering, or injury to an animal without reasonable excuse, including acts of neglect. While more often applied to domestic pets, wildlife is certainly encompassed within these provisions. However, the process by which cruelty to wildlife is investigated and prosecuted can diverge greatly between domestic and wild animals, causing much frustration for law enforcement and AIWC personnel alike.

Difficulties in investigating wildlife abuse starts with the very nature of each AIWC patient: they are wild. We cannot usually tie those patients back to a specific residence. As opposed to pets belonging to families, offenders against wild animals are extremely challenging to pin down. While AIWC staff and volunteers are highly skilled at attending to abused wild animals, the offender(s) too easily remain hidden in the dark alleys of our communities.

Luckily, things are changing for the better for abused wildlife. You may have noticed how stories of animal abuse and cruelty have surfaced more prominently in the media over the last year. Such exposure has heightened public awareness of just how much cruelty goes on in our communities. Greater knowledge invariably leads to greater involvement and less tolerance for cruelty. This can only mean good news for AIWC patients who have been cruelly treated.

A greater focus on animal abuse is developing in our province. For instance, crown prosecutors in both Edmonton and Calgary are helping to raise the profile of cruelty cases with strong prosecutions and by securing convictions. Wildlife is still underrepresented, but the tide is turning. The law enforcement community, along with organizations such as AIWC, are partnering to a greater extent in combating wildlife abuse by more consistently reporting of, and attending to, wildlife victims regardless of which jurisdiction the animal was harmed.

But it starts with all of us: wildlife abuse is a crime and every instance must be reported to law enforcement. Proper handling of evidence (e.g., arrows, pellets, and other weapons left at the scene) helps facilitate investigations. AIWC is developing a mapping scheme which will pinpoint areas where wild victims are found. Progress is happening. We invite you to be a part of it.

Alberta's wildlife depends on collective efforts for protection. Every phone call counts.

A white-tailed prairie hare, the victim of being shot with an arrow in a Calgary suburb, later brought to AIWC for care. Bylaws prohibit discharging weapons in the city, and police would need to prove the hare was shot without the intent to consume it in order to prove cruelty.



Our Thanks

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

PLUS

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Twitter (@AIWC)!



As the days get longer,
so do AIWC's hours!

Starting May 4, centre hours were extended
to 8:00pm each day throughout the spring
and summer to account for greater patient
volumes and natural animal activity.

If you see orphaned or injured wildlife in distress,
please call the centre (403) 946-2361
to arrange a rescue.

...to all the outstanding individuals
who generously contributed crucial
funds, aiding wildlife in distress!

The individual donor list is calculated cumulatively
from January 1st to December 31st each year.
This list covers January 1 to March 31, 2015

Sponsor a recovering animal!

This juvenile muskrat was found on January 15, 2015 on a residential property in Calgary, Alberta. At AIWC, her examination revealed no significant injuries; it appeared that she had simply become displaced. Since it was not yet spring in Alberta, and she would not be able to find a suitable den if released, the decision was made that she would spend the rest of winter and spring in AIWC's care. Over winter, she - and five other muskrats in care - spent time swimming in their individual pools and nibbling on a variety of fresh vegetables.

All six of AIWC's muskrat patients were released in April when the warmer weather had returned to Alberta, the ponds and streams were thawed, and the aquatic plants were beginning to bloom.



SMALL MAMMAL (\$40) MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethicus*)

This issue of the **Recovery Review** features one of AIWC's recent patients up for "adoption". By donating a fixed amount for a featured animal, donors choose how their money is spent. In return, the donor receives an adoption certificate, a glossy 8x10 photograph, and a tax receipt for the full amount of the donation. AIWC's "adoption option" is particularly popular as a gift!

Adopting any of our wild patients helps AIWC with the expenses associated with their rehabilitation.

For more details

www.aiwc.ca
or 403-946-2361

Announcing Something New from AIWC's Education Team!

Outdoor Wildlife Education Excursions

AIWC's Education Team is excited to offer Outdoor Education Excursions: informative visits to both local woodland and wetland habitats for interested groups.

This is your chance to experience Alberta's diverse ecosystems up close with an informed guide.

Our first program was on April 28 at Nose Hill Park where we explored bush and grassland with two classes from Langevin Science School.

To book an excursion for your group, please contact AIWC:

(403) 946-2361
education@aiwc.ca

Time to Renew Your Membership!

New and renewed memberships will be valid until March 21, 2016.

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.

Your membership fee entitles you to:

- A mailed, paper copy of *The Recovery Review*, our quarterly newsletter;
- Discount prices on AIWC merchandise;
- Discounts at local businesses;
- Attendance at AIWC's exclusive Members Only 'Talk & Tour'; and
- The opportunity to participate at the AIWC Annual General Meeting.

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

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

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