

RECOVERY REVIEW

OWLCATRAZ: THE GREAT ESCAPE FROM BARBED CONFINEMENT

by Roxanne Selkirk



Great horned owl
in care, Oct. 2023

If you were a farmer with cattle to manage, how would you encourage them to stay on your property? Fresh grass treats? Backrubs for good behaviour? Cows aren't known for their respect and adherence to property lines, and the invention of mechanically produced barbed wire fence 150 years ago revolutionized cattle management on the prairies. With wood in short supply for fences, and smooth wire fences easily pushed over by roaming cattle, barbed wire provided the discouragement needed to keep cows in the right place.

While barbed wire is a success story for cattle management, the installation of thousands of kilometers of barbed wire fence in Alberta has often negatively impacted native wildlife. Birds-of-prey are unfortunately still susceptible to barbed wire fences, and great horned owls are especially prone to becoming entangled.

While owls have great night vision, wires are hard to see at night and a routine nocturnal hunt can quickly take a turn for the worst if an owl finds themselves entangled in a barbed wire fence. We admitted one such patient back in August of last year, who became caught on a fence at a farm north of Gleichen. The injuries were significant to the right wing and included lacerations, swelling, and thickening of tendons. Our owl patient started physical therapy twice a week under anesthesia and experienced a setback when one of their wounds reopened during a test flight. A cardboard stent provided the wing with additional support, though the injured wing continued to droop all the way to January.

Our involved care plan finally paid off, and after a whopping 198 days in care, our great horned owl patient was finally cleared for a release back into the wild on February 15, 2024.



Great horned owl flight
testing, Feb. 2023



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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.

OUR VISION:

Preserving the legacy of wildlife.

Volume 31 | Issue 2 | Spring 2024

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PRINT: Little Rock Printing

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATE

Spring is here again, and with the arrival of the warmer weather also comes the start of our busiest season at AIWC. Between now and August, we anticipate admitting over 1,200 injured and orphaned wild animals. Most of these will be young baby animals, who have either been orphaned or been injured themselves, and will require high levels of care to get back to the wild. Our dedicated team of staff and volunteers is busy with preparing for the influx, with enclosure renovations, food ordering, and supply stocking well underway!

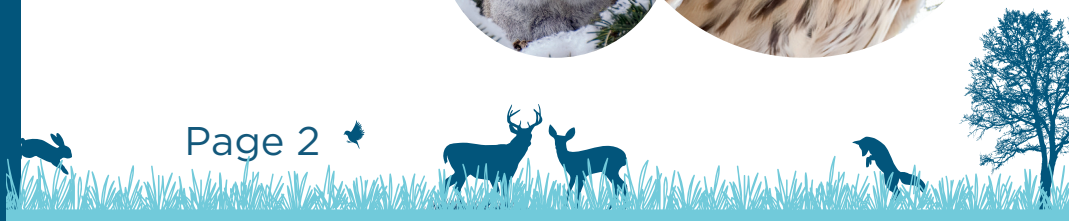
Other improvements, such as the construction of our new Runway and duckling enclosures, were completed over the winter and we are very excited to have these spaces available during the busy season. The Runway, sponsored by Inter Pipeline, has replaced two of our aging flight pens – you can read more about it in the story on page 3. New enclosures such as these make a huge difference to the level of care we are able to provide, and we are so grateful for the support from the donors who made their construction possible.

To help with caring for all of the anticipated baby animals, we are asking for your support during our 13th annual Wildlife Baby Shower. We hope to raise \$25,000 throughout the month of May, which will assist us tremendously in providing our spring and summer patients with everything they need to fully recover. From food and medical supplies to developmentally appropriate housing and enrichment, wildlife babies need a great deal of care, and your help makes all the difference.

Thank you to everyone who helped to support AIWC already in 2024, whether that be through donating funds, food, time, or even simply sharing information about us with your friends and family. Every little bit helps, and we could not do what we do without you!

Sincerely,

Katrina Terrill
Acting Executive Director



A NEW RAPTOR ENCLOSURE COMPLETED

by Raelee Barth, Clinic Operations Manager

Staff outside the completed Runway



We're so excited to announce the completion of a new enclosure for rehabilitating large birds: The Runway! This new space has five separate flight pens inside, each of which has a large pass-through that can be opened and shut between them, providing a variety of benefits for the rehabilitation process. One advantage of this assortment of options is that we can provide our patients with more varied enrichment. Instead of being held in one space while they are building up flight muscles in the end stage of rehabilitation, we can constantly switch up their surroundings to keep them mentally stimulated while in care.

The biggest perk of this new enclosure, however, is the increase in our ability to be able to assess a patient's flight after they have sustained a trauma, such as a broken wing. In the past, we have only been able to assess a patient's ability to fly lengths across a straight enclosure. Now, we can open varying options where we will be able to see how they can maneuver around corners and obstacles, as well as assessing their lift and endurance more accurately. This is especially important for birds of prey who need to have near perfect flight to be able to catch their food in the wild. These tests will give us more confidence that our patients have healed appropriately and will thrive when being released back to the wild.



Great horned owl in care inside the Runway

Runway interior



Great horned owl flight testing

Runway interior



A MALLARD SUCCESS STORY

by Courtney Collins

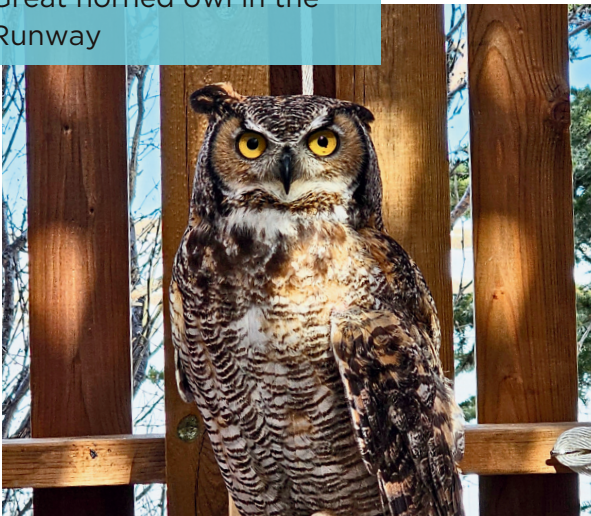
This female mallard came into care on January 15, 2024, with a few missing body feathers, but otherwise seemingly healthy. After week and a half in care, it was discovered this duck was developing frostbite on her toes and both feet had necrosis (dead tissue). The duck was under supportive care to better determine where the necrosis would stop. Once the necrosis stopped, the veterinarian performed an amputation of the affected parts of the toes on the left foot including some webbing between the toes.

The duck recovered for one week prior to the next surgery for the right foot where the affected part of one toe was amputated. The duck was able to recover for another week prior to being able to access the pool again.

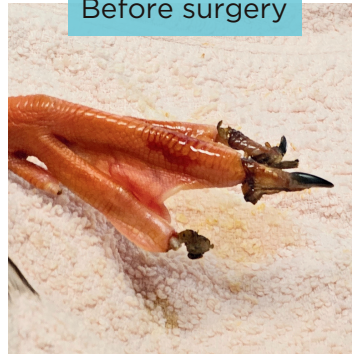
Mallard during an exam in care



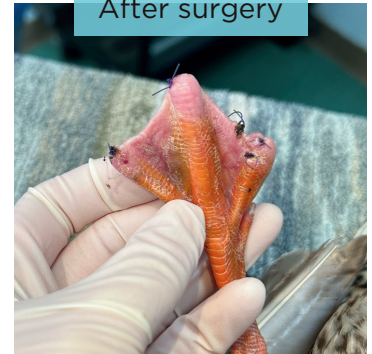
Great horned owl in the Runway



Before surgery



After surgery



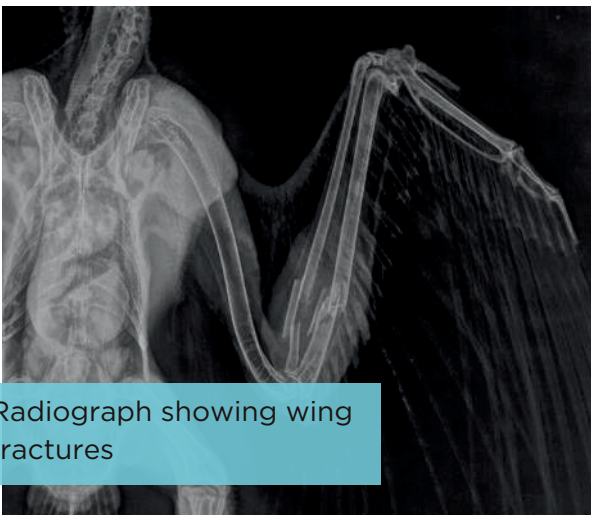
She spent her last few weeks in care in a pool as her surgical sites recovered. Mallard 23-1476 was released back to the wild on March 12, 2024!

GREAT HORNED OWL 24-20

by Chelsea Blyth

A great horned owl was admitted to AIWC on January 31, 2024 post-car collision in Okotoks where it suffered multiple fractures in the left radius and ulna. On February 5, surgery successfully pinned the radius, but the ulna, too close to the elbow, couldn't be pinned. Encouragingly, by February 26, signs of healing emerged with bony callus formation on both bones. The owl was transitioned to the new Runway enclosure on March 8 to facilitate stretching and exercise for rehabilitation. You can help support the recovery of patients like this by donating directly to AIWC.

Radiograph showing wing fractures



BEAR NECESSITIES UPDATE

by Katie Grant



Black bear eating a cob of corn in care

On October 31, 2024, a black bear cub searching for food in the town of Westlock, AB. Fish & Wildlife Officers were notified, and the bear was carefully captured. While the bear was sedated, a brief exam determined that this cub was too small to be relocated and therefore was transferred to the care of AIWC. Upon arrival, he weighed only 13 kilograms. It was determined that he was severely emaciated so he was started on a strict re-feeding protocol consisting of an all-protein diet. After five days of stabilization, a full exam was performed under anesthesia. Other than some small scrapes on his nose and his front paws, most likely the result of looking for food on frozen ground, he was uninjured.

By December, the cub was weighing in at 32.5 kilograms thanks to a healthy diet of fish, meat and produce, with apples, pears, and squash being his favourites. To help him prepare for hibernation, he was given lots of extra straw which he used to form a nice bed for himself. Over the winter months, he would sleep for up to three weeks at a time, waking up for a day or two in between. On March 4, 2024, he woke up fully from his hibernation and started eating food again. AIWC is currently increasing his food until he is on his full bear diet and gaining his pre-hibernation weight back. In June, 2024, once the spring bear hunt is over, AIWC plans to release this black bear into his natural habitat.

A MUSKRAT BURGLAR?

By Scottie Potter, Communications Coordinator

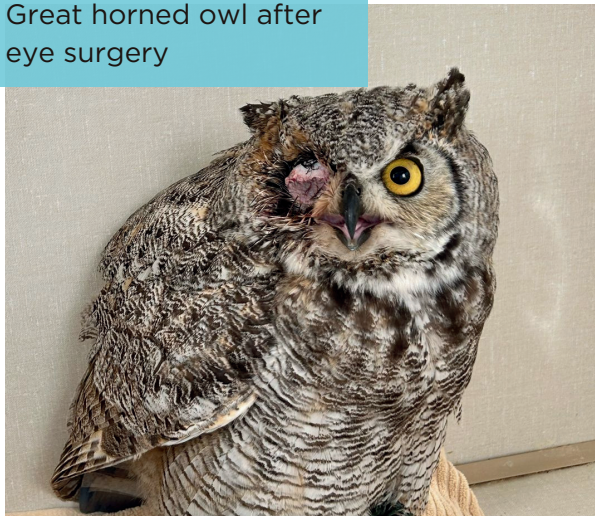
Every spring, newly independent muskrats born the previous year disperse from their natal nests in search of a territory to call home. These semi-aquatic rodents may travel over 30 kilometers in search of proper habitat, and in doing so, can wind up in unexpected locations.

February's thaw likely spurred one such muskrat to travel, who somehow managed to find himself inside the home of a Rocky Mountain County resident. After two attempts to expel the muskrat from their house, the resident called the AIWC and we took in the wayward rodent on February 16, 2024. After determining he was in good health, staff housed the muskrat in our clinic, awaiting the spring melt and the filling of wetlands across the province. While in care, this eccentric mammal endeared himself to staff with his curiosity; each time his pool was refilled he was sure to investigate the hose, often sticking his whiskered face in the spraying water. After spending 67 days in care, the muskrat was released to a wetland on April 23, 2024 where his inquisitiveness will be sure to serve him well.



Muskrat in care

Great horned owl after eye surgery



Great horned owl during an exam in care

THE TIGER OF THE SKY

by H. Lippmann

Found in Rocky View County on February 7, 2024 an emaciated great horned owl with eye injuries arrived at AIWC. Unfortunately, the contents of her right eye were significantly damaged and had to be removed. Our patient was put on eye drops and a refeeding plan containing fish and mice to gain weight and stabilize her before undergoing surgery.

Being an extremely adaptable raptor, she will adjust well to her new situation thanks to her powerful hearing to used detect prey. Great horned owls are nocturnal and their eyes are cylindrical which creates more distance and acts as a telescope. They can also rotate their neck 270 degrees. She will have no problem finding food in the broad range of habitats she calls home.

After two weeks in close care after surgery, our patient was moved to our new outdoor Runway enclosure to encourage movement and build up strength. She was monitored closely to make sure she can properly maneuver and hunt before being released on April 10, 2024!



Short-eared owl in the outdoor flight pen

UP, UP, AND AWAY

by Bonnie Weiss

On January 19, 2023 AIWC took in a new patient – a short-eared owl who had been found in Calgary. This patient was stunned and missing most of its tail feathers, along with damaged flight feathers. Because the bird was also thin and dehydrated, staff began to slowly nurse the patient back to health by tweezer feeding, until the owl began to self-feed.

When off medications, the patient was moved to a small outdoor pen for a few weeks, where they continued to recover well and put on weight. This owl was moved to a large outdoor flight pen, where they were able to keep flight muscles well exercised. They were released on April 23, 2024 after 91 days in care!

Short-eared owls are considered 'Threatened' in Canada and are classified as 'May be at Risk' in Alberta.

FEISTY FEATHERED FRIEND

By Carley Goodreau

On October 20, 2023, a great horned owl was found caught on a barbed wire fence and tangled in string. The string was wrapped very tightly around her, causing soft tissue damage. Despite her injuries, this owl was a very feisty character, and didn't mind ruffling a few feathers! A large wound needed to be sutured on November 9, and her intense personality made cleaning the incision and changing her bandage quite a challenge in the days to come.

During her time in care, the owl damaged some of her feathers, which required "imping" before she could be released. Imping is the practice of replacing a bird's feathers by attaching a new feather to the shaft of the damaged one. This is typically done by using a feather the bird has previously moulted, or one from a closely related species. An imping needle is inserted through the shafts of both feathers to hold the new one in place. This helps the bird to fly properly, and it will shed the damaged feather during its next moult.

After 79 days in care, she was released on January 7, marking the clinic's first release of 2024! Thank you for your support that allows AIWC to care for our spirited patients all year long!



Great horned owl in care



Great horned owl tail feathers being impinged



Long-eared owl in care in outdoor enclosure

LONG-TERM LONG-EAR

by Scottie Potter, Communications Coordinator

January 18, 2024 saw this long-eared owl arrive at the AIWC suffering from a shoulder injury, missing flight feathers, and damage to his eye, possibly caused by a collision of some kind. While supportive care and medication soon healed his eye and his shoulder saw some improvement, it was damage to flight feathers on his right wing that became the biggest concern. As the shafts of these feathers were twisted, it was impossible to attach new feathers through the imping process. That means this owl will be in long-term care until he's completed a full moult of those damaged feathers.

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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
- Our emailed E-news
- Discounted prices on select AIWC merchandise
- The opportunity to participate in the AIWC Annual General Meeting

There are three 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
- Call 403-946-2361

AIWC plans to raise \$1,100,000 this year through fundraising campaigns and initiatives. It will cost the organization approximately \$65,000 to raise this amount. Funds raised will go to support AIWC's mission. For further information, please contact Katrina Terrill at 403-946-2361.

Charitable #: 14041 6140 RR0001

ALBERTA WILDLIFE INSIDER CONTINUES

by Scottie Potter, Communications Coordinator

A new installment of our educational video series, *Alberta Wildlife Insider*, was released in March all about rehabilitating great horned owls. As you can probably guess by how frequently they're featured in this newsletter, great horned owls are the most common raptor species that come through the AIWC clinic, often with extensive injuries that require long-term care.

Learn all about what it's like to care for these feisty feathered hunters by watching the episode on our YouTube channel!



To watch all episodes of *Alberta Wildlife Insider* head to www.youtube.com/@alberta_wildlife

Or scan the QR code here:



AIWC Hours

Our clinic is open to admit patients and accept donations/supplies at these times:

May to August: 9:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.

September to April: 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

(With modified hours on select holidays)

Please call our Wildlife Hotline at **403-946-2361** before dropping off an injured or orphaned animal.

For after hours assistance please refer to our website:

www.aiwc.ca/found-a-wild-animal/after-hours-assistance/

