ALBERTA INSTITUTE FOR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

VOL. 33 / ISSUE 4 /FALL 2026

RECOVERY REVIEW

ONE YEAR IN THE MAKING: A HAWK'S JOURNEY HOME

BY KATIE GRANT



Swainson's hawk on arrival

On August 16, 2025, a juvenile Swainson's hawk arrived at AIWC after being found injured near Aldersyde, Alberta. Thin, dehydrated, and bruised, the hawk had a fractured right ulna (bone in wing) and several damaged flight feathers. Thankfully, the fracture was well-aligned. Since surgery was not required, our veterinarian, Dr. Cara, opted for a figure-8 wing wrap, designed to stabilize the fracture while it heals, alongside pain medication, fluids, and a careful re-feeding plan.

Over the following weeks, the wrap was changed every three days and weekly X-rays tracked the healing bone. By September 11, the fracture had healed enough to begin flight conditioning, but a month of disuse had left the wing weak and drooping. With Swainson's hawks typically migrating as far as Argentina each fall, there wasn't enough time to rebuild the hawk's strength, so a difficult decision was made to keep the hawk in care, giving more time to heal.



After a few months in care

The hawk spent winter moving between an indoor clinic room and outdoor time when weather allowed, then returned to our outdoor flight pen full-time in April 2026 for conditioning. One obstacle remained, though: the original wing injury had damaged several primary feathers, and damaged feathers can't heal; they have to moult out and regrow. Based on the age of the hawk, AIWC knew the moult would occur over summer. So the hawk spent the summer in an outdoor flight pen with vitamin-supplemented meals to support healthy new feather growth.



Swainson's hawk and Red-tailed before release

Exactly one year after admission, on August 16, 2026, the wing was fully healed, new feathers had grown in, and the hawk's flying stamina was strong. The AIWC team returned the hawk to Aldersyde and released them back into the wild, closing out a long road to recovery.

AIWC relies entirely on donations to keep patients like this Swainson's hawk fed, medicated, and cared for until they're ready to go home. Without the generosity of our supporters, stories like this one wouldn't have a happy ending. Please consider donating to help us continue giving wildlife like this Swainson's hawk a second chance.

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Charitable #: 14041 6140 RR0001

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.

AIWC plans to raise **$1,500,000** 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 **Holly Lillie** at 403-946-2361.

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Comments may be sent to **info@aiwc.ca**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATE

It's wonderful to be back at AIWC following my maternity leave! I want to start by extending a huge thank you to Robyn for stepping into the role of Acting Executive Director while I was away, and to our entire team for their incredible dedication and hard work over the past year. It certainly has been a busy one!

In **2025**, AIWC set a new record with **2,103 patients** admitted to our wildlife hospital. I'm amazed to share that we have already surpassed that record, with over **2,180 patients admitted so far in 2026**, and the year isn't over yet! From orphaned deer fawns and a baby mink to injured birds of prey and many, many ducklings, our team has worked tirelessly to give these animals a second chance at life in the wild.

While we are incredibly proud of the work we do, the growing demand for our services also brings significant challenges. Caring for more animals than ever before means increased costs for food, medication, veterinary care, and the many other resources needed to operate our wildlife hospital. AIWC relies entirely on grants, donations, and casino funding to continue providing this vital service, and we are incredibly grateful for the generosity of our community.

As we approach the end of another busy year, I hope you will consider supporting our annual **Give the Gift of Saving Wildlife campaign**, which launches on **Thursday, November 26, 2026**. Every donation, no matter the size, makes a difference and helps ensure injured and orphaned wildlife receive the care they need. Your generosity helps give Alberta's wildlife a brighter future, and we truly couldn't do this without you.

As the days grow shorter and the temperatures drop, I hope you and yours stay safe, warm, and get some well-deserved R&R this winter. Be sure to keep an eye out for wildlife too! Many species overwinter in Alberta, and with our changing seasons and sometimes milder winters, we're seeing some species that would typically migrate choosing to stick around. Who needs a hot vacation, anyway? 😉

Thank you for all you continue to do for Alberta's wildlife. Wishing you a wonderful holiday season and all the best for the year ahead!

Season's Greetings!

Holly Lillie
Executive Director



HOOT-DINI THE MUD MAGICIAN

BY HEIKE LIPPMANN



Juvenile saw-whet in outdoor enclosure

Once upon a time, at a forested kids' camp in mid-June, a Northern saw-whet owl fledgling fought with her siblings and got forced off her perch. Oh no! She tried to claw herself onto the tree but fell from it into the wet dirt below, hitting her adorable face into the soil.

Luckily, a little later, an adventurous little boy was running through the forest and found this thin and dehydrated, but otherwise healthy, baby owl. As fast as he could, he ran back to the camp to get help. Unfortunately, none of the searchers could locate the owl's parents, and she was thereafter admitted to our clinic.

Her feet, legs, and that stunning face with the white Y between her bright yellow eyes were coated in a mud-like substance, and she was missing a few toenails. But after a much-needed cleanup, she again showed her beautiful, rich chocolate-brown and cinnamon-coloured baby plumage.

While with AIWC, she received subcutaneous fluids for a couple of days to help improve hydration, and a calculated number of mice per day to put on weight. She started self-feeding almost immediately and was moved into a large flight area where she was determined to practice her flying and landing skills to avoid any more crash landings.

When she was old enough and in great shape to survive without a parent, our volunteers brought her back to the area where she was found. There, she was heard tooting at dawn, and hopefully enjoys a happy life ever after.

26-550 LONG-TAILED WEASEL

BY COURTNEY COLLINS



Weasel at 2.5 Weeks

The long-tailed weasel, *Neogale frenata*, can be found in a variety of climates, ranging from southern Canada through to the northern areas of South America. This species is solitary, except during mating season, and is both territorial and aggressive toward intruders.

This young female weasel was found alone, curled up in a parking lot in Calgary, and was brought into AIWC on June 7, 2026. She was estimated to be approximately 2.5 weeks old, as her eyes and ears were still closed. She was cold and dehydrated, but otherwise healthy upon intake.

She was housed in an incubator to maintain her body temperature and was fed formula every two hours. As she grew, she was slowly weaned off formula and introduced to mice. Once she was fully weaned, she was moved outside into a larger enclosure for pre-release conditioning.

After just 10 weeks at AIWC, she was released back into the wild on August 14. Her quick journey from a tiny, vulnerable kit to an independent young weasel ready for release illustrates just how quickly this species develops — an important adaptation that gives them the best chance at survival in the wild.

This incredible species plays an important role in Alberta's ecosystems. If you see an animal in distress, please give AIWC a call at 403-946-2361.



Weasel in outdoor enclosure before release

FROM BACKYARD TO BLUE SKIES

BY VIVIAN HINDBO

You might do a double take if you saw a metre-tall bird sitting in a tree. You would likely do a triple take if there were more than a dozen of them in the same tree! You have no doubt spotted a heronry (colony) of nesting great blue herons. You can find these wetland birds in Alberta when they migrate here in the spring for breeding.

The great blue heron is the largest heron in Canada – and the largest wading bird in North America. With their impressive size, you might be surprised to learn they weigh only 5 to 6 pounds (around 2.5 kg). This is thanks to the fact that, like all birds, their bones are hollow.



Great blue heron on arrival

On July 7, 2026, a great blue heron was admitted to AIWC after they were observed in a southwest Calgary backyard, flightless for approximately 24 hours. Upon examination, the heron showed neurological symptoms (moving little and not reacting normally to human contact) and appeared to have limited vision in their left eye (they were walking in circles and did not react to a hand waved in their left field of vision). The heron was started on anti-inflammatory and pain medication.



Great blue heron in outdoor enclosure

Bloodwork showed elevated white blood cells, suggesting infection. We started the heron on antibiotics and, over time, the vision in their eye began to improve, indicating there was possibly an infection behind the eye, or one in the brain affecting the vision. The heron was also quite thin on intake, so we prioritized making sure they were getting enough fish. Initially, they were not self-feeding, so our team was having to force-feed fish twice a day. Fortunately, after a few days in care, the heron started eating on their own!

On July 26, we moved the heron to our outdoor flight pen (a large square enclosure) where they were able to fly, although vision in the left eye had not completely returned. On August 4, we moved them to the runway (a more complex and challenging pen requiring greater navigation skills) to test their ability to land on perches and bank during flight. They successfully demonstrated both skills. With their vision now resolved and flight skills looking good, we released the great blue heron on August 15, 2026.



Great blue heron flight testing before release

Fun Fact:

Great blue herons have a unique hygiene regime. Specialized feathers along their chests and flanks continually grow and fray to form a keratin powder, called “powder down”. Using their bill, they apply this powder to their bodies. They then use their pectinate claws (serrated, comb-like structures on the middle toe of both feet) to comb the powder through their feathers to remove fish oils and marsh slime, and to maintain their waterproofing.

GIVE A GIFT WITH A WILD SIDE

BY ROBYN CUNNINGHAM-DUNLOP

A GIFT THAT GIVES BACK TO WILDLIFE

Skip the guesswork this Christmas and give a gift with a little more meaning!

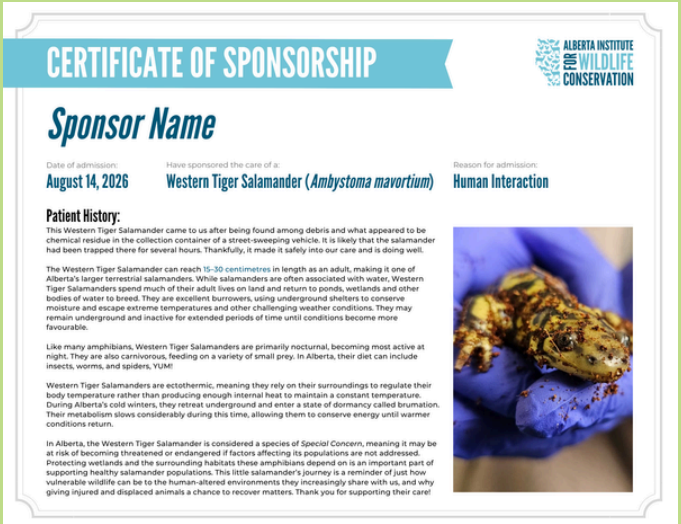
An **AIWC wildlife sponsorship** lets you support the care of a wildlife patient while giving someone special a unique gift they can enjoy all year long. Choose a patient, make a difference, and give the gift of wildlife this Christmas!

For the person who has everything, give them something a little more wild! Sponsor an AIWC patient and help support their care and recovery.



What you will receive:

- A personalized certificate with your name.
- An **8x10 photo** of the patient they're helping to support.
- A **tax receipt** for your contribution.



CERTIFICATE OF SPONSORSHIP

ALBERTA INSTITUTE FOR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Sponsor Name

Date of admission: August 14, 2026

Have sponsored the care of a: Western Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma mavortium*)

Reason for admission: Human Interaction

Patient History:

This Western Tiger Salamander came to us after being found among debris and what appeared to be chemical residue in the collection container of a street-sweeping vehicle. It is likely that the salamander had been trapped there for several hours. Thankfully, it made it safely into our care and is doing well.

The Western Tiger Salamander can reach 15–30 centimetres in length as an adult, making it one of Alberta's larger terrestrial salamanders. While salamanders are often associated with water, Western Tiger Salamanders spend much of their adult lives on land and return to ponds, wetlands and other bodies of water to breed. They are excellent burrowers, using underground shelters to conserve moisture and escape extreme temperatures and other challenging weather conditions. They may remain underground and inactive for extended periods of time until conditions become more favourable.

Like many amphibians, Western Tiger Salamanders are primarily nocturnal, becoming most active at night. They are also carnivorous, feeding on a variety of small prey. In Alberta, their diet can include insects, worms, and spiders, YUM!

Western Tiger Salamanders are ectothermic, meaning they rely on their surroundings to regulate their body temperature rather than producing enough internal heat to maintain a constant temperature. During Alberta's cold winters, they retreat underground and enter a state of dormancy called brumation. Their metabolism slows considerably during this time, allowing them to conserve energy until warmer conditions return.

In Alberta, the Western Tiger Salamander is considered a species of *Special Concern*, meaning it may be at risk of becoming threatened or endangered if factors affecting its populations are not addressed. Protecting wetlands and the surrounding habitats these amphibians depend on is an important part of supporting healthy salamander populations. This little salamander's journey is a reminder of just how vulnerable wildlife can be to the human-altered environments they increasingly share with us, and why giving injured and displaced animals a chance to recover matters. Thank you for supporting their care!



SOMETHING WILD TO PUT UNDER THE TREE!

Looking for a little something for the wildlife lover in your life, or a treat for yourself?

Our **AIWC merchandise** makes gift-giving easy, with wildlife-inspired goodies that help support the animals in our care. Shop our holiday collection and bring a little more wildlife into your Christmas! Visit **www.aiwc.shop** for a full selection of items for sale.

THE RESILIENT RED FOX

BY ZOE JOY



Red fox in outdoor enclosure

The red fox is one of the most clever animals, and most well-adapted to suburban life. However, sometimes becoming too adapted can lead to issues with surviving in the wild. Also, being too close to society can prove to have its own challenges when it comes to keeping wildlife safe. On August 7, 2026, a female red fox was found in Cochrane, AB, with plastic fencing wrapped around her neck and a noticeable limp. It was quite the rescue mission, as the fox was still mobile, but she was eventually contained and brought to AIWC for rehabilitation. Arriving dehydrated, hypothermic, and lethargic, the patient received immediate supportive care from our attentive staff and was quickly on the mend.

Though foxes are related to dogs, they have many cat-like characteristics: long whiskers, retractable claws, and excellent night vision. Also like cats, a fox will hunt alone instead of in a pack. The two parents of a "kit" (baby fox) hunt solo but take turns feeding their young. Foxes prefer to feed on rodents, but will also eat birds, amphibians, and even fruit. They have exceptional hearing, being able to detect a rodent digging underground. Though there are many types of foxes, the red fox is distinguished by their fluffy, white-tipped tail, with sizes typically around three feet long and two feet tall. Their lifespan in the wild ranges from two to four years.

Only a few days after intake, the rescued red fox at AIWC was becoming feisty, which was a good indication that she was starting to feel better already. After a little over a week, she was making a strong recovery and getting lots of attention, even making a debut as an 'Amazing Animal of the Week' in the AIWC email update. The red fox was nursed back to health and released into the wild on August 26, 2026. This recovery story is not only a helpful way to bring awareness to how human-related hazards can endanger and impact wildlife, but also a friendly reminder to avoid littering. Removing any garbage from nature is a small act that can help save the wildlife we love and cherish.

26-971 AND 972 RED-NECKED GREBES

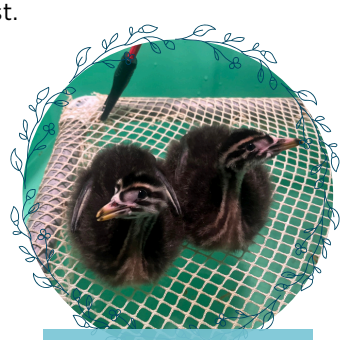
BY ROXANNE KELLY

If you were quizzed, could you name a few differences between grebes and ducks? While it's easy to group all waterbirds because they are birds that are found in water, here at AIWC, it is imperative for our staff to know the precise details of our various patients so we can offer care that aligns with their species-specific needs. This knowledge was invaluable during the rehabilitation of two grebe hatchlings who arrived together in late June from Sylvan Lake. While the birds arrived healthy, our staff had to provide care suited to the unique characteristics of this species, compared to our more commonly cared-for waterfowl, such as ducks.

Grebes don't have webbed feet, and their legs attach towards the back of their bodies. This makes standing and walking around difficult, but their legs are perfectly suited to diving in the water to hunt prey. Unaccustomed to spending much time on land, they need to rest on soft surfaces to avoid developing pressure sores while in care, and access to water is imperative. Grebes also must have opportunities to learn how to hunt live prey so they are ready for the wild, where they will hunt aquatic insects, crustaceans, and fish underwater. Our grebes learned the skills they needed for a successful return to the wild and were released together in August.



Grebes on arrival



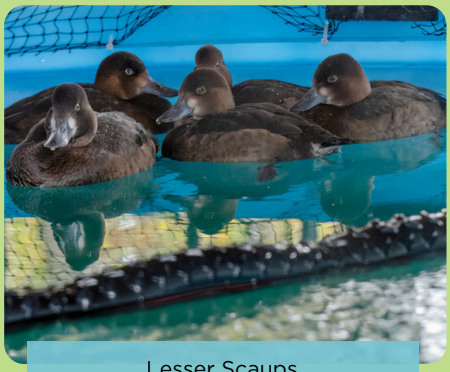
Grebes in brooder tub



Grebes before release

THE SUMMER OF DUCKLINGS

BY KATIE GRANT



Lesser Scaups



Mallards



Redheads

If it felt like ducklings were everywhere this year, you weren't imagining it! As of September 28, AIWC had admitted 501 ducks in 2026, shattering our previous single-year record of 385. We're already well above anything we've seen in previous years, and the season isn't over yet.

Mallards made up the largest share of admissions, with 315 coming into care this year. That surpasses our previous record of 271, set just last year. It's also part of a clear trend: the number of mallards admitted to AIWC has more than doubled in just five years.

The real surprise this summer was the lesser scaup. We admitted 69 so far this year, compared with our previous record of 41. In past years, we've typically seen fewer than 15. At one point this summer, we had 46 lesser scaups in care at the same time, more than double our previous peak of 22. These diving ducks also require more intensive care than dabbling ducks like mallards. Lesser scaup ducklings need worms and slivered fish added to their pools every hour, and their water must be kept as clean as possible. Once they move into our large outdoor pools, those pools are siphoned multiple times a day. While our dabbling ducks need a complete pool change every three days, lesser scaups need one every two days.

Ducklings also kept arriving long after we'd normally expect them. Orphaned lesser scaup ducklings typically arrive during the first week or two of August, but this year, more than half of our lesser scaups arrived after August 15, with the last admitted on August 25. Mallards followed a similar pattern. We normally see our last orphaned mallards by the end of July or the first week of August, but this year, they continued arriving into the first week of September.

Our ducklings represented a wide variety of species this year, including:



Hundreds of ducklings in care at once kept our staff and volunteers busy from morning to night, especially with many requiring hourly feedings and frequent pool maintenance. With the season lasting several weeks longer than usual, the demands on our team continued well beyond what we'd normally expect. Each duckling needed species-appropriate food, clean water, and the space to grow and develop the skills necessary to survive in the wild. Behind these record-breaking numbers were countless hours of dedication and care from our staff and volunteers, all working to give these young birds the best possible chance of returning to the wild.

How You Can Help:

A summer like this one only happens because of the people who stand behind us. AIWC relies entirely on donations, and every worm, every sliver of fish, and every pool change for hundreds of ducklings was made possible by our supporters. We simply could not have cared for this many patients without your generosity. If you're able, **please consider donating to help us be ready for whatever next summer brings.**

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Become an AIWC Member Today!

Support local wildlife, conservation, and education through an annual AIWC membership. Flexible membership levels are available for individuals and families.

Membership includes:

- Quarterly Recovery Review newsletter (digital or mailed)
- Discounts on select AIWC merchandise
- Participation in AIWC's AGM

Join or renew by mail using the attached insert, online at aiwc.ca, or by phone at **403-946-2361**.

Want to Volunteer?

Join more than 145 volunteers supporting wildlife rescue, rehabilitation, outreach, and more. Volunteer recruitment opens twice yearly (January and September), with some remote roles available.

No experience required. Applicants must be 18+. Learn more and apply at aiwc.ca.

https://www.aiwc.ca/get-involved/volunteer/

Go Green with AIWC

Help us reduce paper use by switching to a digital newsletter. To receive Recovery Review by email instead of mail, contact us at **info@aiwc.ca**.

Charitable #: 14041 6140 RR0001

HELPFUL AIWC RESOURCES

Review this page to learn more about reporting injured wildlife, volunteering, becoming a member, and other ways to support AIWC.

SUPPORT AIWC THROUGH SKIPTHEDEPOT!

Turn Bottles into Lifesaving Care!



Your empty cans and bottles can help wildlife in need; just **schedule a pickup** through **SkipTheDepot** and select AIWC as your charity. It's free, easy, and supports our rescue and rehabilitation efforts! Use the promo code '**AIWC**' to give us 100% of the earnings.

THERE ARE SO MANY MEANINGFUL WAYS TO SUPPORT WILDLIFE BEYOND MAKING A DIRECT DONATION!

Bring Wildlife Education to You: Have an event, classroom, or community group looking for a unique experience? AIWC offers engaging in-person and virtual education programs for all ages. Learn more about Alberta's wildlife! Programs are now booking for the year ahead. Email **education@aiwc.ca**.

Double Your Impact: Many employers match charitable gifts, doubling your donation through workplace giving programs. Check our website to see if your employer participates. aiwc.ca/support-us/matching-gift-programs

Shop with Purpose: Support wildlife by purchasing AIWC merchandise, shopping our Amazon links, or donating needed items through our Wish List.

Give in Other Meaningful Ways: Support AIWC by voting through MyGivingCircle, donating shares and securities, or exploring our Leave a Legacy giving program.

Every action helps wildlife. Visit **aiwc.ca/support-us** to explore all the ways you can make a difference.

AIWC HOURS

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

May to August: 9:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Sept to April: 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM
(Exceptions on select holidays)

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

