

Autumn - 2022

# NEWSLETTER



Photo by: Hospital Staff

Thanks to all our Summer Staff!



Photo by: James MacKenzie

MARS property looking gorgeous in the sun!

Welcome to the Autumn 2022 edition of the MARS Newsletter!

Another summer has gone by, and we have still yet to see what a "normal" summer looks like for us here at MARS. The onset of the Avian Influenza (HPAI) put added stress on the hospital and forced our visitor centre to fully close to the public. We have slowly opened back up in stages, carefully balancing the need to fundraise for the hospital while ensuring our patients and ambassador birds remained safe. A huge thank you to all volunteers, interns, and staff from the hospital and visitor centre who adapted to an unusual summer.

Summer's close also means an end to the help we received from all the interns and Canada Summer Job staff who joined us for the hot months. A big thanks to Maria, Ashley, Gaby, Emma, Craig, Hayley, Lucy, and Natalie from the hospital, and Oliver and Ashley from the visitor centre. Your contributions and smiling faces will be missed!

We are looking forward to having you visit us in the coming months as we open back up. Please enjoy the newsletter and check our website and social media for updates.



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### HPAI UPDATE

As you can all imagine, we at MARS Wildlife Rescue Centre have had our regular going-ons disrupted by the worldwide outbreak of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. HPAI was also present locally, with cases being reported over the past few months in domestic poultry flocks on local farms within the region and confirmed cases reported from our hospital.

With HPAI posing a real risk, the MARS Wildlife Hospital had to pivot our energy from the planned building expansion to ensuring our patients and resident ambassador birds were kept safe. The hospital remained open but with much more strict biosecurity and new quarantine protocols to ensure patient safety. Disinfectant footbaths were set up before any bird contact, and people bringing donations and incoming patients were asked to stay in their car while a MARS team member collected the injured wildlife or much appreciated donations.



Photo by: Jan Smith

Kiersten, assistant manager of wildlife rehab, with a patient

On the public side of things, the visitor centre closed for over a month (and is still in a partial opening state) while the ambassador bird program was temporarily put on hold. Now, we thank all guests for helping keep our ambassador birds safe by spraying the soles of their shoes with disinfectant before viewing eagles in the flight pen or seeing our ambassador bird at the gift shop. We thank all our members and visitors for their understanding and our volunteers for sticking with us through these difficult times.





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### WHO'S LANDING IN THE HOSPITAL?

*Ginny St. Pierre, a board member and volunteer, regularly updates volunteers about what's going on in the hospital. Following are some excerpts from those updates over the past few months.*



Photo by: Gyl Anderson

Fledgling Purple Martin



Photo by: Gyl Anderson

Garter Snake resting in the hospital

Well, it's here: Summer has arrived and the hospital has seen a big increase in patients. From May 20th to September 8th, the hospital added 543 patients, from 284 patients to 827! Luckily, this year's heat wave was a bit later in the season and the hospital did not see the same influx of patients as last year. Hopefully, the heat missed the peak nesting season (remember, last year the extreme heat came in June!)

Some notable patients this late Spring and Summer included many fledgling swallows (Barn, Tree, Violet-green, Purple Martin), a Garter Snake with a habit of flipping upside down, multiple species of bat, a nestling Black-headed Grosbeak, and a Blue-listed Peregrine Falcon who was hit by a car in Royston. In British Columbia, there are three colour-coded conservation statuses for all wildlife that call our oceans, mountains, forests, marshes, grasslands, and cities home: Yellow, Blue, and Red, which correspond to Least Concern, Special Concern, and Extirpation Risk (local extinction), respectively. The next patient story is about a Blue Listed Species.

**Autumn - 2022****NEWSLETTER****PATIENT UPDATES CONTINUED**

In mid-June, a young, newly fledged barn owl was seen by the owners being chased by crows. The owners of the farm had seen the owl flying quite low earlier in the day, and later they saw the owl again when it landed in a horse paddock ("enclosed area where horses are saddled"). When they went to see where it landed, the owl let itself be easily picked up. The little owl was extremely dehydrated and had a few scabs on his belly but was otherwise just a very young (approximately 2 months old) owl. The owl was introduced at the MARS hospital in a very passive way with a family of 5 other barn owls that were born earlier in the year. A bird bander from VIU came up and banded all 6 Barn Owls. After some flight testing, this blue listed species was released!



Photo by: Hospital Staff

Bundle of Raccoon Kits



Photo by: Hospital Staff

Juvenile Barn Owl

It has also been a year of extraordinary raccoon patient numbers. At one point, our caregivers were tending to over 60(!) raccoon kits at one time. Raccoons are intelligent, curious and total troublemakers, so they need a lot of enrichment from our caregivers to keep them occupied. All that exploring means a big mess to clean up as well, but when it comes to saving animals, it's all part of day's work.

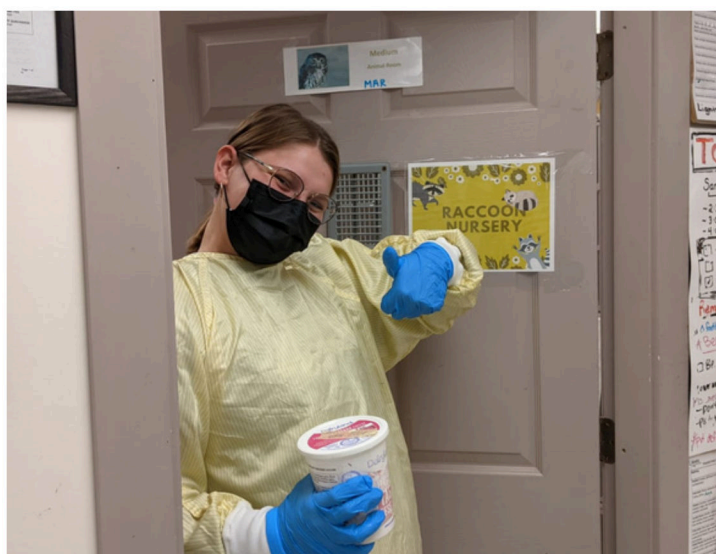




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### SITE UPDATES

As always, the MARS site is always evolving and many projects were started, continued, and completed over the past few months. The MARS team is in the process of building a directional sign on our lower property which will be visible from the highway and a welcome sign at our entrance on Williams Beach Road, so keep your eyes peeled for our new signage as you drive up the Old Island Highway.



Marioline is a new addition to the site, volunteering from the Netherlands!

A number of danger trees were removed from the property and snow guards are being installed on the flight pen. Our building permit for the hospital was reviewed and everything was found to be in order (the good news), the bad news is we cannot expect to get a building permit until November, although we did achieve a building permit for the Fawn ICU.

Lots of busy times ahead!



Photo by: James MacKenzie

Jane Thompson as a Sandwich Board

### NOTICE OF MARS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



**SATURDAY  
OCTOBER 15TH, 2022**

**10 AM TO 11:30 AM  
AT THE MERVILLE HALL  
1245 FENWICK RD., MERVILLE.**

**Autumn - 2022****NEWSLETTER****STAFFING UPDATE**

After serving many years at MARS both as a volunteer and a staff member, Robert McLennan has moved on to focus on his business, Valley Home Check. Over the years, Robert held titles here, including MARS interim manager, volunteer and education coordinator, and most recently interim manager of the visitor centre, filling in for Diane Weir. Diane expertly managed the visitor centre since it opened and supported her dear friend Maj Birch from the beginning, almost 30 years ago. Diane's retirement left a legacy and Robert stepped up to take on the work. As a "thank you" for his many years of service, Warren, Pearl, and the board presented Robert with a MARS Lifetime Membership. Congratulations, Robert, good luck with your business, and thank you for all the memories and hard work.



Warren, Pearl, and Robert with a MARS Lifetime Membership

Taking over from Robert, we are excited to announce that Allison Morrison is our new visitor centre manager. After years as a caretaker and board member, Allison is now spending her weekends at the visitor centre making positive changes, formalizing processes, and continuing to ensure the centre is in a strong position to support the hospital financially. Welcome back, Allison.



Allison Morrison, the new VC Manager



**Autumn - 2022****NEWSLETTER****VOLUNTEER FEATURE**

When work needs to be done at MARS, from tightening a screw to helping construct large buildings like our eagle flight pen, the loyal construction crew is called upon. Headed by our president Warren Warttig, the team is always busy with their mission never-ending. Dean Melsness, a mainstay of the construction crew for years is our Volunteer Feature for this season's newsletter.



Dean Melsness - thank you!



Dean in the flight pen

Dean moved to Vancouver Island over 17 years ago and first crossed MARS' path at Kitty Coleman Woodland Gardens. Soon, Dean found himself on site having a conversation with Warren about

construction and from then on, Dean and MARS have only looked forward. Dean is now a mainstay at MARS, where he has contributed by installing doors and reinforcing exhibits, to building shelves for the Visitor Centre or making nesting boxes and food enhancement toys for the wildlife.

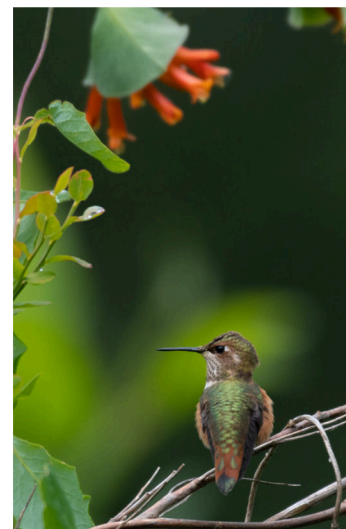
MARS is lucky that Dean's creative side is also able to flourish - the driftwood eagles at the entrance to the VC, inventive crafted birds made from recycled tools along the tour path, and wildlife silhouettes hanging along fences and decks are all examples of Dean's creativity. Dean has also brought his twin brother Don and niece Kelly on board as well and MARS is better for it. We cannot thank you enough, Dean.

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## WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS ON SITE

At the Visitor Centre Kiosk, we are now recording a seasonal tally of all the wildlife seen on site at MARS. Please email any sightings to James at [education@marswildliferescue.com](mailto:education@marswildliferescue.com) and submit your sightings to [eBird.org](http://eBird.org) or [iNaturalist.org](http://iNaturalist.org) using our MARS hotspot.



Rufous Hummingbird and Honeysuckle

The MARS property continued to welcome migrating birds throughout the late spring and early summer.

Almost overnight, a community of breeding birds sprung up, and each day, those who tuned their ears to the correct avian frequency would hear Western Tanager, Willow Flycatcher, Swainson's Thrush, MacGillivray's Warbler, Cedar Waxwing, Rufous Hummingbird, and a whole host of other colourful birds that only call Vancouver Island and our property home for the warmer months of the year. Perhaps the most conspicuous breeding birds on the property were the family of Canada Geese that were born in our wetland, the Violet-green Swallows that were a constant presence overhead and in our nest box, and the family of Merlin that fledged and kept all our small songbirds on edge.



Violet-green Swallow



MacGillivray's Warbler

**Photos: James MacKenzie**  
**Taken on site at MARS**



Canada Geese and Goslings



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**NEWSLETTER****NATIVE PLANT FEATURE**

Photo by: Jan Smith

Pyrobombus on goldenrod

Late summer is a golden time at MARS as the tall yellow spires of *Solidago lepida*, Western Canada Goldenrod put on a flower show. This bright herbaceous perennial is abuzz from early August to late October, hosting native solitary bees, bumble bees, wasps, hoverflies, butterflies, moths, and farmed honey bees. If you arrive at MARS early in the morning before the dew is off the ground, you'll find bumble bees asleep in the small daisy-like flower clusters of goldenrod. When they wake, bumbles and their allies will once again forage for the pollen and nectar that this native powerhouse offers. The sweet nectar attracts the pollinators, then the large, heavy pollen grains stick to their bodies. Canada Goldenrod is incapable of pollinating itself, so the task must be done by visiting insects.



Photo by: Jan Smith

Goldenrod &amp; asters at MARS

Goldenrod is sometimes mistaken for the notorious allergen, ragweed. Ragweed flowers don't contain nectar so these plants rely on the wind to move their lightweight pollen, which can blow for kilometers. And here's a blessing: ragweed doesn't even grow on Vancouver Island!

Complimenting the sunny glow of the goldenrod in the MARS meadows is the purple-blue of the Douglas aster, *Symphyotrichum subspicatum*. Both plants reach up to 1.5m and are easy to grow from seed. Plant these two beauties in a sunny



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**NEWSLETTER****NATIVE PLANT FEATURE CONTINUED**

spot in your yard and watch a parade of pollinators from summer to late fall. And bonus! American Goldfinches, White and Golden-crowned Sparrows, and Dark-eyed Juncos will love the natural banquet you place before them.



Join the team - Teamwork makes the dream work!

Want to learn more about planting with wildlife in mind? We welcome volunteers at our regular "garden parties". Find out how to identify our native species and exotic and invasive plants. Dig in and join the habitat stewardship team--no green thumb or experience necessary. Contact Jan at [huzzah71@gmail.com](mailto:huzzah71@gmail.com) or leave a message at the MARS office.



MARS WILDLIFE RESCUE

**HOOTIN'  
HALLOWE'EN  
50/50 RAFFLE**

OCTOBER 1 - 31  
WIN UP TO \$25,000!  
*Must be in BC  
at time of purchase*

**Tickets online at [marswildliferescue.com](http://marswildliferescue.com)  
or at our gift shop Friday to Sunday!**



**Autumn - 2022****NEWSLETTER****FEATURE BIRD**

Dusk approaches in late Spring as Salmonberry bushes begin to ripen. A collection of odd noises begins to emerge from the forest understory: a sharp whist, followed by a goofy queep and a call that sounds like water dropping brings to mind an odd collection of nocturnal animals... until an beautiful flute-like song spirals hauntingly into the still air. The impressive auditory show currently on display is from a Swainson's Thrush, a medium sized migratory songbird with olive upperparts and a spotted breast. More often heard than seen, this shy relative of the familiar American Robin, spends its winters in Mexico, Central and South America, and makes the journey every year to breed across the more northerly parts of North America. Their arrival on Vancouver Island is closely tied to the emergence of Salmonberries, so much so that it is known as the 'Salmonberry Bird' by different Northwest Coastal Indigenous groups.



Photo by: James MacKenize

Profile view



Photo by: James MacKenize

Bringing food home

While the arrival of the Swainson's Thrush is closely tied to Salmonberries, their favourite food in spring is mostly insect based, with ants, grasshoppers, caterpillars and beetles often taken. In the fall and winter, berries and fruit are preferred, with Swainson's Thrushes preferring red berries to yellow.

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## THANK YOU FOR READING

Thank you so much for reading this Newsletter.

We appreciate all members, donors, volunteers, staff members, and visitors.

Without each of you, MARS Wildlife Rescue wouldn't be where it is today.

If you are thinking of joining as a volunteer, please refer to the below page for all our current volunteering opportunities or visit [marswildliferescue.com](http://marswildliferescue.com) for more information.



### Volunteer at the Visitor Centre

The MARS Visitor Centre supports the hospital through public education, fundraising, property maintenance and development

*New volunteers accepted throughout the year*

Must be a MARS member to volunteer  
 Some roles require a criminal record check  
 Provide proof of full COVID vaccination



### Volunteer at the Hospital

Join our dedicated team and help rescue, rehabilitate, and release injured wildlife.

*Hospital volunteer intake from October 1 to March 31 only*

Must be a MARS member and 18+ years to volunteer  
 Some roles require a criminal record check  
 Provide proof of Tetanus and full COVID vaccination



### New Volunteer Opportunity

### The Visitor Centre is creating a brand new volunteer position

Must be a MARS member and 18+ years to volunteer  
 Provide proof of Tetanus and full COVID vaccination

#### Guide/Educator

- Lead small groups on indoor and outdoor tours
- Talk about MARS history, dangers to wildlife, patient stories, and ambassadors
- Enthusiastic communicator with people of all ages

#### Gift Shop Volunteer

- Be the first friendly face our guests see
- Ring in purchases, assist with retail shop
- Handle, count, and balance cash
- Assist with cleaning

#### Wildlife Caregiver

- Provide care to wildlife patients incl: feeding, food preparation and washing enclosures
- Cleaning and upkeep
- Work can be rewarding but also physically demanding and emotionally challenging

#### Ambassador Caregiver

- Assist in feeding, cleaning, enrichment of our non-releaseable ambassadors
- Ensure they live interesting and comfortable lives
- Ideal if you love animals but don't want to work in wildlife recovery
- Must be able to carry 30lbs

#### Construction/Maintenance

- Provide labour and skills in carpentry, electrical, plumbing, and site prep
- Willing to work on-call and in small teams
- Any other skills appreciated

#### Habitat Stewardship

- Establish and monitor native plants, wetland and other wild areas
- Work in small teams
- Learn about native flora and fauna and their interactions

#### House-keeping

- Help with cleaning, laundry, disinfecting, sweeping, & mopping
- Perfect to help out the hospital without direct contact with wildlife

#### Transport Volunteer

- Respond to requests to transport animals and supplies in the Comox Valley and mid/north Island
- Use your own vehicle
- Become a crucial link in saving wildlife

#### Special Events

- Represent MARS at public events in the community
- Help raise funds to support the wildlife hospital
- Set up and take down, handle cash, and sell items

### Visitor Centre Assistant

- Assist Visitor Centre Manager with cleaning and organizing the Gift Shop and Visitor Centre
- Help create a environment of curiosity and awe in the Visitor Centre and Gift Shop

**For more information and to show your interest for this new role, please contact:**

**Allison Morrison,  
 VC Manager**

[vc@marswildliferescue.com](mailto:vc@marswildliferescue.com)

**For more information and to sign up, visit:**

[marswildliferescue.com](http://marswildliferescue.com)

Get Involved → Volunteer