

**Winter - 2023**

## NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the winter edition of the MARS Newsletter. Grab a hot coffee or tea, bundle up, and enjoy an update on the past few months at the MARS Wildlife Rescue Centre.

A busy holiday period saw our gift shop bring in record revenue of over \$17,000 for just the month of December 2022 alone, the most for any month since the Visitor Centre opened in 2019. Thank you to all our dedicated volunteers for helping fundraise so much money for our patients.

We want to thank our work experience volunteers Nate and Alice, from England and Hong Kong respectively, for their hard work this winter. MARS feels honoured that young people are willing to learn, gain experience, and volunteer their time with us. Lucie is our current work experience volunteer until March, joining us from France.

Late 2022 also saw our AGM completed - thank you again to our volunteer Board of Directors, and all that spoke, attended, and asked questions. Thank you to Jan Smith, who stepped off the board, and welcome Linda Hawk, who is starting her term on the board.

We understand that not everyone wants to receive repeated reminders about MARS fundraising raffles. To give our valued members and donors a choice, we're developing a distribution list, based on MARS membership and previous raffle participants. Should you wish to limit MARS communication, please visit [marswildliferescue.com/unsubscribe/](https://marswildliferescue.com/unsubscribe/)  
Thank you!



MARS AGM 2022. Thanks, Board of Directors!

**Winter - 2023****NEWSLETTER****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.*

As autumn makes way for winter, most migratory species have passed us by or have arrived for the winter. Waterfowl like Trumpeter Swans and Snow Geese have come through our hospital due to migratory exhaustion, and migratory songbirds like Golden-crowned Sparrows and Varied Thrush were admitted to our hospital because of cat attacks or window strikes. We encourage you to make a difference by keeping your cats indoors and treating your windows with anti-collision stickers. One species of bird that is usually out of range of cats and windows is one you are all likely familiar with: the Common Loon, although not all may know this bird is also migratory.



Common Loon - breeding plumage



Common Loon - winter plumage

Denizens of northern lakes in the summer and residents of our coastlines in the winter, Common Loons are rarely found far from water but for one concerned person in Campbell River, that couldn't have been further from the truth! They found this poor loon right in the middle of the road - luckily before being run over! Unlike most water birds, loons need long "runways" of undisturbed water for take-off, as their backset legs built excellently for swimming don't allow them to get airborne again from a stationary position. Sometimes, in fog or other low visibility conditions, flying loons will mistake roads for bodies of water, crash land, and will be unable to take off again.

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We are also pleased to announce another new arrival in the hospital, although this one is a bit different. That's right, we have made a new hire - welcome to the hospital rehabilitation team: **Isabel**, who is relocating from the Lower Mainland to join us. Isabel is passionate about wildlife rehabilitation and has experience at the Wildlife Rescue Association of BC, Critter Care Wildlife Society, the Vancouver Aquarium, and the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre. Good luck in your new role Isabel!

**Did you know?**

Bald Eagles will lock talons during their daring mating displays, but will also lock talons during fights with rivals, as we found out!



Two Bald Eagles locked together

Rounding out our patient updates is an unusual story - we received a "two for one" deal when two adult male Bald Eagles came into our hospital from Mudge Island - found locked together on the ground with blood and feathers everywhere. The two eagles were separated and the smaller of the two combatants was quickly put into the flight pen and released within weeks. Surprises are always around the corner at MARS, as the larger of the two eagles tested positive for lead poisoning. Luckily, his levels were fairly low and after a round of chelation therapy and some time in the flight pen, the second eagle was also released. Let's just hope these two keep their talons away from each other!

**Winter - 2023****NEWSLETTER****SITE UPDATES**

In 2022, construction at the wildlife hospital was impacted by various factors such as delayed building permits, skyrocketing lumber prices, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, and the Avian Flu. Despite these challenges, progress was still made on the hospital expansion and Fawn ICU, thanks to the efforts of volunteers on the Construction Committee.

Looking forward to 2023, MARS has an ambitious list of projects planned. These include the continued expansion of the wildlife hospital, construction of a Fawn ICU, new mews for various birds such as Horus the Red-tailed Hawk and a 20' extension for Marlowe. Furthermore, there are also upgrades planned for the infrastructure of the hospital including access road and egress road, below-ground power and water infrastructure to the Fawn ICU and other buildings. BP2 has been awarded the contract for the construction of the hospital expansion and Fawn ICU, however, there may be opportunities for volunteers to assist in reducing costs, thus contributing to the overall goal of improving the facilities and care at the wildlife hospital. Thanks again to the hard work of our dedicated volunteer Construction Committee



Our wetland covered in snow and ice



A new Trumpeter Swan taxidermy for the VC



**Winter - 2023****NEWSLETTER****VOLUNTEER FEATURE**

When John and Betty moved to the Comox Valley over a decade ago from Edmonton, our local wildlife quickly introduced themselves by way of a crow in distress with an injured wing struggling in their backyard. Not knowing what to do, a friend suggested they contact MARS (Mountaineer Avian Rescue Society). The response was quick and within 30 minutes, our founder Maj arrived on the scene. John and Betty were impressed by the prompt and efficient service and got to chatting with Maj.

Their encounter with MARS sparked a love for wildlife conservation and the MARS community and they soon got involved with our organization. Both started by selling raffle tickets and later joined the special events committee. One day, when a volunteer bird handler took a break, John filled in by displaying a stuffed eagle using the handler's routine. It was the beginning of John's journey as a bird handler, a role he has been dedicated to for the past 10 years. You can see him plying his trade on Saturday afternoons, accompanied by our Western Screech-owl, Lanei.



High-vis Betty at an event



John and Betty with their donated picnic table in 2023

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### VOLUNTEER FEATURE CONTINUED



John presenting with his stuffed raptor at Kitty Coleman



John and Lanei, 2022

Betty, on the other hand, transitioned from years on the Special Events Committee and is currently a dedicated gift shop volunteer. Not only that, but she also collects the MARS donation cans you see in businesses around our community. Both John and Betty have been volunteering with MARS for 13 years now and their passion for wildlife conservation shines through in all that they do. Their contributions were recently recognized with a new table plaque at the Visitor Centre, honouring their years of service and dedication to our cause.

We also wanted to thank everyone who attended our Cosmic Bowling volunteer social in January. Keep your eyes peeled for future events and don't be shy if you have a great idea for a fun activity!



Kiersten showing off how it's done!





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### WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS ON SITE

As fall faded quickly into winter, the last southbound migratory birds flocked to the MARS property in search of a final bountiful feast before embarking on their long journey south. Our diverse avian population is a true spectacle, with sparrows, birds of prey, waxwings, and goldfinches flitting about, each a unique flash of colour and personality. Try not to get distracted as you get your work done!

One of the most elusive sightings is the White-throated Sparrow, a bird that is usually only seen during migration. Their distinctive white throat and yellow-striped head make them easy to spot amidst the flurry of activity. The return of Red Crossbill flocks overhead is another highlight, as with the beautiful Varied Thrush spotted in our back woods. The cacophony of noisy Merlin and Pileated Woodpeckers further adds to the spectacle as the skies above MARS are filled with the majestic silhouettes of Bald Eagles, soon to be joined by the first migratory Turkey Vultures.



Perhaps the most numerous and captivating birds on the property are the Dark-eyed Juncos. These small and abundant sparrows are altitudinal migrants, meaning they breed in high elevations and winter closer to sea level. They are particularly fond of the property's native plant gardens, where the seeds and hidden insects provide ample food all winter long. The sight of these dapper little birds flitting about the native gardens is truly entertaining, their white outer tail feathers flashing as they jostle and bicker amongst themselves.



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### FEATURE BIRD



As you cruise through a rural area, you might just get lucky and spot a brilliantly coloured bird of prey perched attentively on a powerline or fencepost. Bestowed with a smart orange-coloured back, attractive slate-blue wings and a fancy "double-moustache," the American Kestrel is certainly a bird to remember. No bigger than a Steller's Jay or Northern Flicker, the American Kestrel is our smallest species of falcon, weighing on average of 120 grams. Don't let the size fool you though, this bird is full of mettle, often harassing birds 20 times their size!

Unlike its big cousin the Peregrine, who catches large prey like ducks, pigeons, or even loons(!), the much smaller, more dainty Kestrel fills its stomach with minute prey like mice, small birds, lizards and insects like grasshoppers and dragonflies. Kestrels are one of the few birds who employs a hover-hunting technique, using vast amounts of energy to suspend themselves like a helicopter over the best hunting grounds before diving downwards to claim their prize.

Although these fierce falcons do breed on Vancouver Island, the Comox Valley's relatively mild winters bolster the kestrels' local population, as birds from chilly northern reaches flee to our shores in the hope of finding consistent food. Good local spots to find this bird are Cox Road, Kin Beach, and along the Comox Airport fence.



American Kestrel eating a worm at the Comox Airport



American Kestrel as a MARS patient  
Dec 2021





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### NATIVE PLANT FEATURE

Pacific Crabapple or *Malus fusca* is a small tree with features attractive to the human eye (gnarly bark, short and twiggy stature, fragrant, white blooms, yellow to red fruit and red-orange fall colour) making it visually appealing in a home garden hedgerow or as a specimen planting that can also contribute to screening, background or framing in the garden. The real magic though is how it functions ecologically. Found or adapted to moist to wet soils and tolerant of salt water, it is both food and shelter to so many creatures. In early spring, birds will choose it for nesting and year-round it will be a trusted resting spot. Native bees such as the mason bee will be busy visiting the blooms in late spring to early summer. Many insects will feed or shelter on the leaves or twigs and in turn become food for birds. Late summer to late fall and even into winter the crab apples can be fruit for people (huge indigenous connection along the entire range), birds, butterflies such as Spring Azure and Western Tiger Swallowtail and small mammals like squirrels and mice to large animals like bear and deer. The list of local birds that will feed on the fruit include Evening Grosbeaks, Spotted Towhees, American Robins, woodpeckers of all types, Cedar Waxwings, Varied Thrush and grouse. Even hummingbirds will probe the trunk for sap!

Plan for it, plant it  
in the right place  
and they will come!  
Look for it in nature  
and you are sure to  
see other creatures  
too!



Pileated Woodpecker



Varied Thrush with a crabapple treat!



Pacific Crabapple in Spring

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# NEWSLETTER

## THANK YOU FOR READING

Thank you so much for reading this newsletter. Please share it with your friends. 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

#### 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

#### 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

#### 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



### 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

#### 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

#### House-keeping

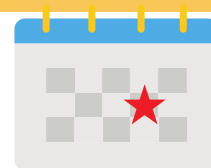
- Help with cleaning, laundry, disinfecting, sweeping, & mopping
- Perfect to help out the hospital without direct contact with wildlife

#### 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



### Volunteer Recruitment Event



**Saturday, March 5th**  
**12-4pm**

### Volunteer Recruitment Event (open house)

- If you know any friends or family who are interested in volunteering, please encourage them to attend this event
- we will have snacks and beverages

**If you would like to help out, please contact**

**James MacKenzie**  
 Education & Volunteer Coordinator

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

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

[marswildliferescue.com](http://marswildliferescue.com)  
 Get Involved → Volunteer