

Spring - 2023**NEWSLETTER**

Welcome to the Spring edition of the MARS Newsletter.

We have seemingly had all four seasons encapsulated in the past month or two. I have been hailed on, sunburnt, windswept and soaked - and just imagine how the migratory birds feel!

Life at MARS has been as busy as the weather, with a host of international work-experience volunteers joining us, much construction and progress being made on site, multiple school field trips a week at the Visitor Centre, and the start of baby bird season in the wildlife hospital.

We are also saddened to announce the passing of two of our most beloved Ambassador Birds: Shakespeare the Barred Owl and Brinley the Great Horned Owl. A tribute page will be included in this newsletter.

In order to support the wildlife hospital, we are running a MARS Summer Raffle with 8 fantastic prizes to still be won! Tickets will be sold at the Visitor Centre or online and we can take cash, debit or credit. Good luck!

**Stay tuned -
a new
Ambassador
Bird is
coming soon**



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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.

Since the last newsletter, we have climbed from 59 patients in care to the current 329 patients in care as of early June. Some notable or uncommon patients include a Cackling Goose, a Beaver, a Western Painted Turtle, a fledgling Barn Owl, a Common Loon, a litter of abandoned Townsend's Vole and multiple Rufous Hummingbird.

Our top reasons for admission continue to be window strikes, cat attacks, and vehicle impacts. Regarding windows in particular, if you are encountering this problem at your house, please come by the Visitor Centre or email me at education@marswildliferescue.com for some potential solutions. With the number of patients brought in and anecdotes from tour guests, window strikes are clearly a widespread problem that can often be reduced by treating our windows.



American White Pelican evading capture



Brown Pelican with pouch puncture



Kiersten and Isabel tend to Pelican

Spring - 2023**NEWSLETTER****WHO'S LANDING IN THE HOSPITAL?
FEATURE STORY**

From Sand Dollars to sea ducks, Orca Whales to the smallest fish, the waters off Vancouver Island hold many living treasures. However, one creature that people from these parts don't see too often is a pelican! When most people think of these massive pouched birds, their mind likely wanders to California, where legions of Brown Pelicans plunge powerfully into the Pacific (please excuse my alliteration) to hunt fish in the hot sun. There also exists a second species of pelican in North America, one that does not practice dive-bombing but merely filter feeds while swimming, is all white with a protuberant horn on its bill, and is twice the size of a Brown Pelican. Sounds almost... made up, but we'll come back to that in a minute.

Occasionally, and perhaps in response to shifting food availability, Brown Pelicans will invade our waters, being sighted most commonly off Victoria or Tofino. Surprisingly, we received a Brown Pelican as a patient in mid-May, from the unlikely location of Port McNeil. This adult bird had been attacked by eagles on a beach in our wild North Island. He was left very skinny and dehydrated and has multiple puncture wounds, including on its pouch! This bird spent time in care at MARS and was stabilized and tube fed delicious fish puree up to six times per day. Our patient was then transferred to Wild Arc in Victoria for surgery and release.

This is where we circle back to the aforementioned White Pelican. Breeding in British Columbia's interior on a few secret lakes is the Westernmost breeding site for this species in Canada. One White Pelican seemingly got lost in migration and was found alone at Tyee Spit in Campbell River. In all the hubub of finding a rare pelican, the local birding community noticed the bird had a wing injury. MARS was called out to attempt two marine rescues but the Pelican had just enough energy to evade capture both times. While we weren't able to admit this White Pelican, we hope that it recovered from its injury and completed its migration. Can you believe we almost had two types of pelican in the MARS Hospital? Photos above.

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SITE UPDATES

The last site update, we spoke of the planned upgrades 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. Well, lots of work has been done! Specifically, the below ground infrastructure to supply water, power and communications to the Fawn ICU (construction started recently) and water and power to the proposed Raccoon food prep building in nearing completion.

We want to thank all volunteers, past and ongoing, for their contributions to the evolution of the MARS site.

On to the future. Both construction of the hospital expansion and the current and new mews (the structures we house our Ambassador birds in) are expected to start soon. This is very exciting news for all!

Two of our Ambassador Birds, our beloved albino crows Nimpkish and Kokish, are enjoying some new architecture. Our two melanistically challenged corvids have enjoyed their pen-air popouts (also known as 'poop-outs') for over a year now, but were in for a treat when our construction crew installed a mega-pop out. Come check out the crows and maybe if you're lucky, you'll see them on their "crow-walk".



Brand new crow-walk!

Spring - 2023**NEWSLETTER****VOLUNTEER FEATURE**

Jill Relyea, newly moved to the Island in December 2019, found herself on a quest for meaningful connections in her new community. Eager to explore unfamiliar territory, Jill attended a diverse range of events, always seeking something new to learn. It was at one such gathering, a presentation on the long-standing Trumpeter Swan Research Project, that Jill stumbled upon her next great discovery.

The event being held at the MARS Visitors Centre, Jill struck up a conversation with Pearl McKenzie (our Vice President) after the talk. Through their discussion, Jill's interest in volunteering at MARS Wildlife Rescue Centre was ignited. Having spent over four decades working as a medical technologist in various hospital settings, Jill possessed a deep passion for caring not just for humans, but for all creatures.

Embracing her role as a volunteer at the Wildlife Hospital, Jill finds solace in the ever-present tasks of animal care. Whether directly attending to the patients or working on related duties, there was always something to be done. The dedicated staff at MARS proved to be a constant source of inspiration, offering guidance, sharing their wealth of experience, and fostering a supportive environment. Encouraged by her time at MARS, Jill pursued additional training, completing a basic animal rehab course. This led to her assuming the position of a rehab assistant at the hospital and taking on the role of a mentor to new volunteers, guiding them through their initial shifts and providing informative site tours.



Common Raven - Jill's Favourite Patient

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CONTINUED**

While Jill's love for all wildlife knows no bounds, her affinity for birds has been ingrained since childhood. Recently, her attention has shifted toward the enigmatic Crows and Ravens, who have made a lasting impression on her. Although the hospital environment can become demanding when caring for an increased influx of fragile young patients, Jill has learned to find a rhythm amidst the chaos. The rewards of nurturing and feeding these vulnerable creatures outweigh the challenges, as she finds immense fulfillment in contributing to their well-being.

Through her unwavering dedication and nurturing spirit, Jill continues to play a vital role in the Wildlife Hospital at MARS Wildlife Rescue Centre. Her journey as a volunteer has not only allowed her to connect with the island community but has also reignited her childhood passion for birds, solidifying her commitment to the welfare of all wildlife. Thank you Jill for all your hard work.

We are actively recruiting
Gift Shop Volunteers and Visitor Centre Guides

Volunteer with us in marswildliferescue.com
the Visitor Centre! Get Involved → Volunteer



engage with
likeminded people



support the hospital's
efforts to save local
wildlife



make a difference
in your community



MARS
WILDLIFE RESCUE CENTRE

Section Written By: James MacKenzie

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AMBASSADOR TRIBUTE PAGE



SHAKESPEARE
AMBASSADOR FROM
2005-2023



BRINLEY
AMBASSADOR FROM
2012-2023





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WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS ON SITE

The hot weather is certainly upon us and so are the birds! Head out to MARS one fine Spring morning and the first thing you will surely notice is the impressive diversity of migratory breeding birds. Yellow Warbler, Violet-green Swallow, Cedar Waxwing, Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Tanager, Common Yellowthroat, MacGillivray's Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Willow Flycatcher are just a few of the birds that are choosing to call the MARS property a home for the summer! Just look at some of those stunners!

The Violet-green Swallows are nesting in three different bird boxes on our property, and one nest box is visible from the Visitor Centre window. Peek out from inside and maybe you'll see our lady swallow peeking out of her home. These gorgeous western swallows are a constant site overhead our wetland, saving our volunteers and guests from mosquito bites! If you are looking for some insect aid, consider stopping by our gift shop and purchasing a swallow box.



Cedar
Waxwing

Western
Tanager

Black-headed
Grosbeak

Common
Yellowthroat

eBird

Record Bird Sightings,
upload video and audio



iNaturalist

Record Bird, Plant,
Mammal, Amphibian,
and Insect Sightings



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FEATURE BIRD/BIRD SOUND ID

For many, the early morning Spring chorus of bird song brings feelings of joy and contemplation, but for some: frustration at all the birds you're missing?! Similar to learning a new language, learning to decipher the colourful wonders singing cryptically in the canopy can unlock an entirely new world full of vireos, flycatchers, warblers and more. To take your birding to the next step, learn bird calls and song and discover why bird "watching" is only half the fun.



Practice by learning the songs of common, easy to observe local birds and once you know your local "crew," you'll hopefully recognize any new bird sounds. Another tool you can use to help identify bird song is the Merlin Bird ID app for smartphones. In addition to providing range maps and physical ID tips, Merlin Bird ID also has a feature where it can identify the birds singing around you using your smart phone's microphone. Simply download the (free) app and turn it on as you enjoy your morning coffee and it will provide a real-time list of the birds singing and calling around you. And, as a bonus, if you are hard of hearing Merlin will pick up those difficult to hear high-pitched birds. (I'm looking at you: Kinglets and Cedar Waxwing).

One bird that is usually only detectible by song is the Townsend's Warbler, a small, streaky-faced yellowish bird that casts its soft, lilting song from high in coniferous trees. The Townsend's Warbler's signature sound can be described as weazy and buzzy, with ending notes on the higher pitch. Townsend's Warblers breed in mature woods dominated by conifer trees so it is no surprise that British Columbia holds the majority of the world's breeding population. Rewards like a glimpse of a Townsend's Warbler in your binoculars are often only achieved through bird song identification. So don't fret if you feel lost during the dawn chorus. Take it one bird at a time, and before long you won't be able to turn off the sound ID in your brain!



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NATIVE PLANT FEATURE

There is a good number of Black Twinberry (*Lonicera involucrata*) shrubs growing naturally at MARS. Find them under the alders between the Visitors Centre and the Wildlife Hospital and to the east of the wetland. Bees and hummingbirds love this plant which starts to bloom in mid-spring, then just keeps going until early fall! Talk about a plant that "contributes" to habitat. The twin yellow flowers are framed by the magenta bracts behind them which are later a bright background to the shiny twin purple-black berries. The berries are inedible by humans but adored by many fruit-eating birds including flickers, grosbeaks, cedar waxwings, thrushes, grouse and juncos. Overall, twinberry attracts and supports a variety of insects and is a caterpillar host plant and larval food source for native moths and butterflies. Look for Western tiger swallowtail butterflies nectaring on the flowers. The berries were used medicinally and as a dye plant by First Nations people.



Twinberry is arching in form to three m tall with attractively textured grey bark. It is a great plant for a sunny to part-shade hedgerow or screen in a moist to wet area. Or plant it at the edge of a woodland, but in either setting pair it with some of the other under-story plants it often associates with such as red twig dogwood, western columbine, tufted hair grass, willows, rushes and monkey flower.

Would you like to know more about gardening with native plants? We have a page with references on our website: <https://marswildliferescue.com/native-plant-resources/>



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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 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

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

For more information
and to sign up, visit:



marswildliferescue.com
Get Involved Volunteer