

Summer/Fall - 2023

NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the Summer/Fall edition of the MARS Newsletter. This Newsletter will cover the period from early summer until late October. Put the kettle on and enjoy.

Our wildlife hospital was busy with patients as usual this summer, with young animals making up the majority of intakes. Luckily, we had the help of an incredible roster of international and domestic work experience volunteers, summer staff, and of course our dedicated volunteers to support our staff members. Raccoon season quickly shifted to baby bird season, leaving our hospital helpers without a free moment as the feeding alarms dictated their every move. All this was occurring while serious progress was being made on the construction of the hospital and fawn ICU. Add in hot, dry weather and it was another difficult summer managed by the hospital team. A huge thank you to all involved with wildlife care over the summer.

As fall moves in, there is a reduction in overall patient count but a shift in admission causes. Unlike the summer full of orphaned babies, animals that need our care during the fall and winter often suffer more severe injuries caused by car collisions, entanglements, or window strikes.

School field trip season is very much upon the Visitor Centre, with Thursdays and Fridays often full of wee ones exploring and learning. Another busy summer in the gift shop is leaving us feeling ready for Christmas. Come get your hummingbird feeder heaters before the first freeze!

Enjoy the newsletter!

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



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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.

Since the last newsletter, we have climbed from 329 patients in care as of early June to 850 patients as of the end of October. Some notable or uncommon patients include a Mourning Dove, two Rhinoceros Auklets, a Merlin, a Saw Whet Owl, two Marbled Murrelets, and a Western Painted Turtle.

As with each summer, young birds, often orphaned or kidnapped, make up a large percentage of our intakes. Mammals included a litter of Townsend's Voles and an infant mink from Quadra Island, as well as many young ducks, hummingbirds, robins, sparrows, and other songbirds. In early August we welcomed 4 baby Pacific-slope Flycatchers, which was the last time we will ever record this species in our stats... not because this species is going extinct or anything - it is being renamed! According to the bird authorities that be: The Pacific-slope Flycatcher is now known as the Western Flycatcher.

Other success stories include 3 released Barn Swallow fledglings from Campbell River, 2 Rufous Hummingbird babies whose mother died trapped in a garage were hand-raised by MARS and released, and finally a Peregrine Falcon admitted on July 3rd from Dove Creek Road, is recovering nicely in the flight pen and is almost ready for release.



Rhinoceros Auklet Nonbreeding Plumage



Western Flycatcher's nest close to people

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A Marbled Murrelet came in from Gold River having been found outside someone's house. He was just hanging out in the yard and as you might know, murrelets are seabirds so they don't "do" yards. Likely, he was either blown off course, or possibly landed mistaking the yard for water. This can happen to inexperienced seabirds or during inclement weather. Either way, this murrelet was stranded on an island of land. MARS hospital staff quickly confirmed the bird as a Marbled Murrelet and had a volunteer meet the finders in Campbell River to bring the stranded bird to MARS.

Marbled Murrelets are **Red Listed** in British Columbia, due to habitat loss threatening their unique nesting strategy. Unlike almost every other type of murrelet who nest in burrows or on the ground on rocky islands, Marbled Murrelets lay a single egg high up on a mossy branch of an old growth tree, sometimes many kilometres from the ocean. Young murrelets must launch themselves towards the ocean from their nest on the first try, some failing to make it to the ocean, much like the subject of our story here.



Marbled Murrelet

Much to the surprise and delight of both the transport volunteer and later our MARS hospital caregivers, this murrelet was obviously loved and pampered, which showed in the home the finders built it. Imagine a cardboard box that has been decked out and reinforced structurally with paper towel rolls and duct tape. They didn't stop there though, as they lined the box with what looks like sod (yes living grass) and put a nice little blanket in there for this little birdie for good measure! This little bird weighed in at 76 grams, about 1/3rd of the size of an adult.

Unfortunately, after weeks of good progress, and despite the comfortable abode and careful care, the Marbled Murrelet unexpectedly passed. Bloodwork indicated he had an extremely high packed cell volume and total protein for a skinny bird. This indicates severe dehydration and a possible infection. It is also possible this bird had HPAI. This story highlights the difficult nature of work in our wildlife hospital.



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SITE AND PERSONNEL UPDATES

Permits for the hospital extension finally received! With our growing patient count and diversity, increased space is needed and we are very excited for this next phase in our wildlife hospital expansion. Thank you to all who have gotten us to this point and thank you to those who will help in the future. Framing is already up and progress is going quickly. However, it is not all expansion in the hospital, as long-tenured Assistant Manager of Wildlife Rehabilitation Kiersten Shyian moved on from over half a dozen years at MARS. A big thank you to Kiersten for all your hard work and good luck in the future!

We are excited to announce that Isabel Morales has filled the vacant role of Assistant Manager of Wildlife Rehabilitation, while Lara Harder has stepped in on contract as the Ambassador Program Coordinator. Additionally, Megan Erickson has joined the hospital team on a one-year contract as a full time Wildlife Rehabilitator. Good luck to you all!



Progress moving fast on the hospital expansion

Finally, on the construction front, our deer fawn ICU has officially started construction as well. Our new access road is coming along thanks in large part to a generous donation of culverts by Intefor Corp. Lastly, virtual tours extended to all the way up to Prince George so thank you to Ginny and Warren for their dedication to that program.



Welcome Megan and Lara!

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MARS MAKERS (FEATURED VOLUNTEERS)

There are dozens of local makers who contribute to MARS. Some provide goods all year, others prefer to participate in specialty sales. While each MARS Maker follows their own unique passion and creative flair, they all converge under a common banner during the annual MARS Christmas Craft Pop-Up event. This year, the pop-up will run from November 15th to December 24th, showcasing an impressive array of handmade goods that span the spectrum of artistic expression.

Visitors to the sale can enter the special "Maker's Raffle" to win some of the specially crafted one-of-a-kind items. Prizes will include stained glass by Dean Melsness and a stunning hand-made bird house from Jon Lloyd.

For these Maker Donors, their crafts are not just expressions of their artistic talents; they are acts of love and kindness towards the natural world. Through their efforts, they are not only preserving wildlife but also inspiring others to join the cause. This heartwarming collaboration between artisans and wildlife conservationists serves as a reminder that everyone, no matter their skills or background, can contribute to a better future for our planet's most vulnerable inhabitants.

So, as the holiday season approaches, consider visiting the Mars Wildlife Rescue Christmas Craft Pop-Up.




These are some of the Makers for Mars:

Vancouver Island artisans and craft enthusiasts, driven by their passion for wildlife, make unique items that MARS sells, or raffles, to raise funds for the care of injured and orphaned wildlife. Despite their diverse backgrounds, MARS "Maker Donors" all help us raise thousands of dollars that go directly to the rescue and rehabilitation of local wildlife, one handcrafted piece at a time.


MARS MAKERS (FEATURED VOLUNTEERS)

Fibre Arts




Fibre enthusiasts, from knitters to sewers and beyond, are keeping visitors well stocked with warm mitts, unique toques, tote bags, and even quilts. For example, Kory's hand-knitted owl toques are sold exclusively at MARS Gift Shop, and they have become a fashion standard in the Comox Valley! Marg Fowler contributes her hand knitted washcloths to a number of local non-profits, including (fortunately) MARS.

Creative Sewers




Diane Pollock and her sewers have been creating wonderful mesh-lined totes in wildlife motifs for MARS for years, long before there was a gift shop. Lately they've been trying out some new designs such as, travel cases, cross body bags, and under different circumstances, colourful face masks.

Recycled Mittens



Ida Sauve's mittens from recycled sweaters are a holiday favourite. Warm and environmentally sound. Makers like Ida contribute to our members environmentally ethos, as well as our interest in unique handmade merchandise.

Oceanic Artistry



Dan Davies, an artist specializing in seashell collages, brings the beauty of the sea to land. He meticulously arranges shells into stunning pieces of art that capture the essence of marine life. A group of local artists also contribute their personalized shell ornaments and dishes in varying forms, throughout the year.



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MARS MAKERS

Avian Abodes

Schalk Lombard and Dean Melsness each contribute a fabulous array of birdhouses and owl boxes. Schalk and Dean insist that these wooden structures must be kept affordable, and safe for our local birds.



Those Hummingbird Feeder Heaters

Once it gets cold we can't keep the hummingbird feeder heaters on the shelves! Countless hummingbirds have kept going through the coldest winter days thanks to Cliff and Wendy Craig's hand-crafted hummingbird feeder heaters. Every year we sell literally hundreds of them.



Stained Glass for a Cause

Don Melsness, a stained glass artist, uses his craft to shine a light on the beauty of nature. His intricate stained glass creations depict local bird species as well as some of MARS resident ambassador birds. Nancy Morrison's spectacular eagle panel was a highly coveted item in our Summer 2023 Raffle.



Whimsical Wooden Specialties

Skilled woodworkers create beautiful, utilitarian and thoughtful hand made items. Bob Baldwin a talented woodworker, together with his daughter, creates painted wooden animals for kids. His whimsical creations ignite children's imaginations while instilling a love for wildlife.



Thank you to all our MARS Makers



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Call for
Crafters
for our Gift Shop Holiday Pop-Up

If you want to sell
local, handmade, winter & Christmas themed goods
November 16th to December 23rd in Merville
contact Allison Morrison at:
vcmanager@marswildliferescue.com / (778) 428-1990

We are also actively recruiting
Gift Shop Volunteers and Visitor Centre Guides

Volunteer with us in
the Visitor Centre!

marswildliferescue.com
Get Involved → Volunteer



engage with
likeminded people



support the hospital's efforts
to save local wildlife



make a difference
in your community



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Merlin cruising by

WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS ON SITE

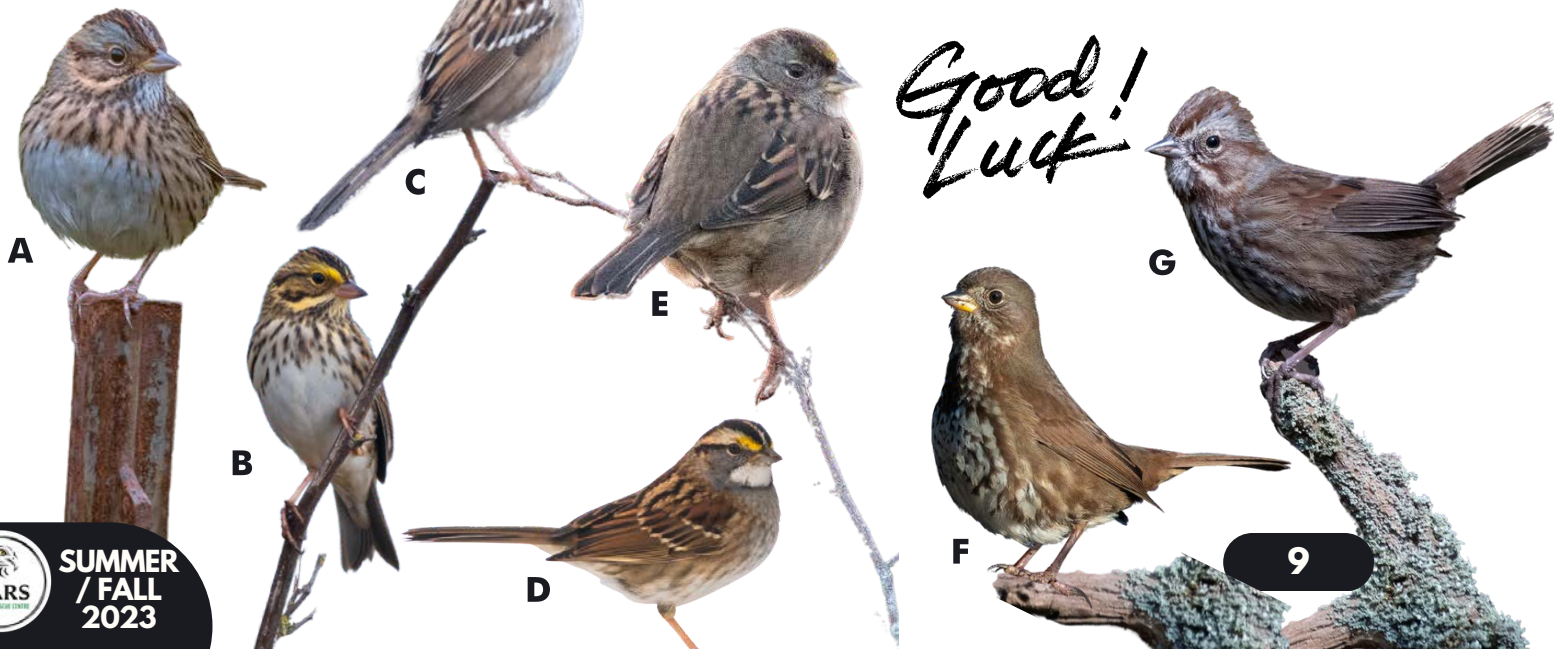
Our restored wetland was centrepiece at the Visitor Centre, with Summer Staff turned loyal volunteer Aaron Schmidt heading the pond exploration. Multiple Northwestern Salamander "mud puppies" or "sirens" were caught and temporarily displayed at the Visitor Centre, along with an assortment of interesting pond life. Thanks Aaron and helpers for all your hard work with the wetland this year - we all learned so much!

High Summer is usually a slow time for birdwatching on the MARS property. Most birdsong has stopped as energy is better used to feed and protect the young ones. Still, our family of Violet-green Swallows were everpresent, fledging another batch of young that will hopefully return next year. Their flight was often on edge as the local Merlin family shared the same airspace. As Summer faded into early Fall, the flocks of migratory sparrows have arrived in full force, nibbling up our tasty seeds and insects from our native gardens. Our Fall sparrows are notoriously difficult to ID. Try to name each sparrow in our quiz!



Northwestern Salamander "siren"

- Song Sparrow
 - White-crowned Sparrow
 - Lincoln's Sparrow
 - White-throated Sparrow
 - Golden-crowned Sparrow
 - Savannah Sparrow
 - Fox Sparrow
- (answers on last page)





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FEATURE BIRD

A flash of feathers and talons is all the duck saw before it met a swift end. The fastest bird in the world, the Peregrine Falcon, was the predatory culprit. Ranging across every continent except Antarctica, Peregrine Falcons instill fear in aerial prey as wide ranging as pigeons, shorebirds, migrating songbirds and even other birds of prey - all the way to large gulls, geese, and loons. In a stoop (dive), Peregrines are capable of reaching speeds up to 390 kmph, and have been known to K-O birds as large as Bald Eagles or Brown Pelicans in a single stooping dive. Peregrines nest on cliffsides, rocky outcrops, or more recently tall building ledges in cities. Here on Vancouver Island, we are lucky enough to encounter Peregrine Falcons at any month of the year, but spring and fall migration are more reliable periods as many of these falcons migrate great distances, shadowing their favourite prey's journeys all the way to the breeding grounds. A friend that was aboard a cruise ship as a nature educator relayed they had a total of 8 Peregrine Falcons following them, hunting hapless migrating songbirds using the ship as refuge over the vast ocean.

However, this story was once almost lost forever. In the early 1970s, Canada and the US banned the then-popular pesticide DDT, which caused extremely low birth rates due to egg thinning. Iconic birds that we all enjoy today like the Peregrine Falcon and Bald Eagle were once almost reduced to extinction. Without individual activism, highlighted by Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, which in turn spurred policy change, I would not be writing this article now.

Now, you might wonder where one might find a Peregrine Falcon around these parts. Your best bets are coastlines, including the Courtenay Airpark, Tree Island, and Tye Spit. Or... you could come to MARS! We are excited to announce a new ambassador bird, a Peregrine Falcon, as part of our tours starting hopefully before the New Year. We are holding an naming contest, so keep your imagination and eyes ready. We will announce publicly when this bird is ready to be viewed and named.



Peregrine Falcon making a pass at a Great Blue Heron



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NATIVE PLANT FEATURE: GARRY OAK

Mature Garry oaks (*Quercus garryana*) are the perfect tree for the spooky season. At this time of year, their exposed gnarly limbs and twisting branches seem to be sweeping the sky, ready to catch creatures of the day or night. The iconic silhouette and furrowed grey bark distinguish them as ancient giants. They are slow growing, drought tolerant, fire resistant, and the keystone species of a critically endangered ecosystem. Pressures from urbanization, agriculture, and coniferous forests have reduced Garry Oak habitats to just a few remnants on Vancouver Island.

In Merville, we are north of the historic range of Garry oaks, but with a changing climate these trees are growing well at MARS. We have three ten-year-old oaks planted near the Visitor Centre, surrounded by flowers and grasses associated with the ecosystem, including Nodding onion, Yarrow, Clarkia, Seablush, Woolly Sunflower, California Brome, Roemer's Fescue and especially Camas, the purple-blue star of Spring.

It has been a mast year for oaks, so you are likely to find many acorns among the fallen leaves beneath the massive trees in Courtenay's Vanier Nature Park, which contains one of the few remaining Garry Oak groves in the Comox Valley. This fall, the Steller's Jays, Band-tailed Pigeons, and other native birds feasted on the bumper crop. Native slugs, amphibians, and reptiles and also enjoying the leaf litter. Our friends at Comox Valley Nature, are proposing a collaboration with the City of Courtenay to embark on a multi-year project to restore and regenerate the trees in this special park



WHICH OAK SILHOUETTE IS SPOOKIER?

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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

Sparrow Quiz Answer Key

- G** Song Sparrow
- C** White-crowned Sparrow
- A** Lincoln's Sparrow
- D** White-throated Sparrow
- E** Golden-crowned Sparrow
- B** Savannah Sparrow
- F** Fox Sparrow

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