



Spring - 2022

NEWSLETTER



Photo: Jan Smith

Visitor Centre and native garden in bloom



Photo: Gyl Andersen

Caregiver Brenna Lerch with a feathered friend

Welcome to the Spring 2022 edition of the MARS Newsletter!

As the pandemic drags on, we continue to be very busy here at the MARS Wildlife Rescue Centre. Over the past year, as an essential service, the wildlife hospital received 1421 patients, an increase of 25% over the previous year. Some of the most common patients of 2021 included Pine Siskins, American Robins, Anna's Hummingbirds, and Raccoons, with some unusual admittees including two out-of-range and first-time patients: a Common Poorwill and a Northern Flying Squirrel.

Although health restrictions closed our visitor building for much of the year, more than 3200 people visited us on site for outside tours or took part in Zoom presentations, and MARS' Facebook page continues to grow, now with 42,000 followers.

We are truly grateful to our volunteers, donors, members, and staff, all of whom make it possible for us to help wildlife, one patient at a time. Please enjoy this Newsletter :)



NEWSLETTER

HPAI UPDATE

You may have heard that in mid-May, a case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) was found in a poultry flock in the Comox Valley. This puts our patients and Ambassador Birds at great risk and we have made the very difficult decision to temporarily close our Visitor Centre and Gift Shop on May 16 to reduce the danger of on-site transmission of the virus.

The wildlife hospital will remain open and continue to accept patients but, if you are bringing an injured animal or donation to MARS, please remain in your vehicle. Call the hospital at 250-337-2021 ext. 0 to speak to rehab staff. The staff will come retrieve the animal or donation from your vehicle.

Do not bring deceased wild birds to MARS. Please call MARS at 250-337-2021 for guidance. You can also report suspicious bird deaths to the Bird Hotline: 1-866-431-BIRD (2473).

We hope that we will be able to resume normal operations in a few weeks. Please follow us on Facebook or check our website for more information. In the meantime, thank you for your support and understanding.



Bald Eagle with Lead Poisoning (some similar symptoms)



Spring - 2022

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.



Photo: James MacKenzie

Ancient Murrelet off Stories Beach

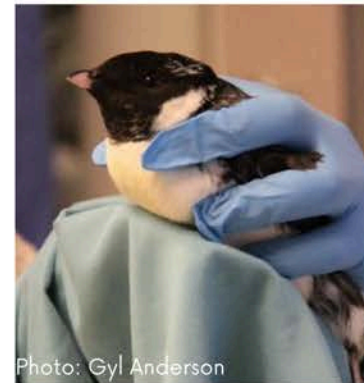


Photo: Gyl Anderson

Ancient Murrelet in the hospital

Starting off, imagine you are enjoying a fresh cup of morning coffee in your rural Merville backyard when suddenly, a football-sized UFO plummets from the sky and lands awkwardly in front of you, clearly in distress. Well, that's what happened to one Merville resident, who called MARS about an Ancient Murrelet, a small, highly ocean-going seabird who is known for roaming the North Pacific and is uncommon in our area. This puffin relative was showing sure signs of a narrow escape from a predator, and it's lucky our team was there to help. It rains a lot on Vancouver Island, and as we all know, when it rains, it pours. A second Ancient Murrelet came through our door in February, marking a recent majority of our very few encounters with this species.

Fun fact: Ancient Murrelets chicks are born in burrows on small islands, but don't get fed until they join their parents at sea!

PATIENT UPDATES 2

Winter is a tough time for all birds, and when you weigh as much as a Canadian nickel, even more so. That is the case for the now-widespread Anna's Hummingbird, a winter resident on Vancouver Island that has increased in population dramatically in recent years. The conversion of forest to their preferred suburban habitat, complete with ornamental flowers, hummingbird feeders, and a warming climate means more of these feisty flying jewels than ever before are gracing our backyards, parks, and even natural areas.



Photo: Gyl Anderson

One leg - no worries!

At the MARS Hospital, we are seeing this effect in real time, having admitted a record 48 Anna's Hummingbirds in 2021. This winter's record-breaking cold temperatures were especially hard on these hapless hummers, especially one particular patient, which you can find out about on the next page.

PATIENT UPDATES 3

As Ginny writes: "A little adult Anna's hummingbird in Courtenay got his foot stuck frozen on top of a wind chime. The homeowners tried to unstick him by placing their fingers on either side of the bird to warm up his feet. Of course, this little thing was panicking (rightfully so) and was buzzing and trying desperately to flutter away. In that moment, his leg snapped as the foot was still frozen in place. According to Gyl, [our Wildlife Rehabilitation Manager], it was almost completely severed. Sadly, his foot had to be amputated at the hock joint. On the bright side, he still has one foot. Gyl bandaged the amputation site which you can imagine was incredibly tiny, but Gyl said he sat still for the bandaging. Miraculously, this Hummingbird recovered from its amputation and was released with only one leg back to Courtenay."



Photo: Gyl Anderson

Hummingbirds in treatment



Photo: Robert McLennan

Cliff and Wendy Craig



Huge thanks to Cliff and Wendy Craig for donating almost 100 hummingbird feeder heaters to the MARS Gift Shop. Your hard work has helped save countless hummingbird lives and raise close to \$2500 for MARS. Thank you!



NEWSLETTER

SITE UPDATES

Until last month, our patients had to be taken off-site to a veterinary surgery for x-rays, and although we remain enormously grateful for the generosity of our local vets, this carting-about caused added stress for our injured animals. Now we are joyously celebrating the newest addition to the MARS hospital: a proper examination room with its own x-ray machine! This is very exciting news for all involved and many patients have already experienced the benefits.



Photo: James MacKenzie

Tsolum River Watershed Display

The construction crew added a new cut-out walkway for Nimpkish and Kokish, so stop and wave if you see our two albino corvids enjoying the recent sunny weather. 'Feather Friendly' anti-bird collision tape, has been added to some windows, and "did you know" factoids were sprinkled around the Visitor Centre, which now features the return of two displays - our bird sound system and Tsolum River Watershed display which have been lovingly restored to the delight of those who come through our doors.

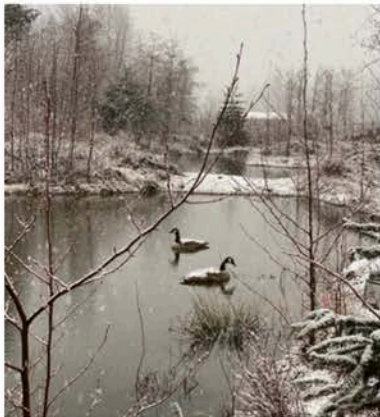
The outdoor Kiosk has been updated with new panels for recording wildlife sightings on site as well as displaying recent updates and newspaper articles. Some future site upgrades over the Spring include constructing and expanding mews for our ambassador birds, improving our swan pen, and of course expanding the hospital to support out growth.

WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS ON SITE

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



Wildlife highlights for February, March, and April include constant sightings of our resident Pileated Woodpeckers, two Common Redpolls identified within a Pine Siskin flock, a female Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Ring-necked Duck, Belted Kingfisher, and a gaggle of Canada Geese using our wetland. Early migrants include the first Yellow-rumped, Yellow, and Orange-crowned Warblers, Violet-green Swallows, and teetering Turkey Vultures. Add in the first singing Song Sparrows, the return of the Rufous Hummingbirds, a slinky mink, and a noisy Merlin and we're off to a great start for the Spring!



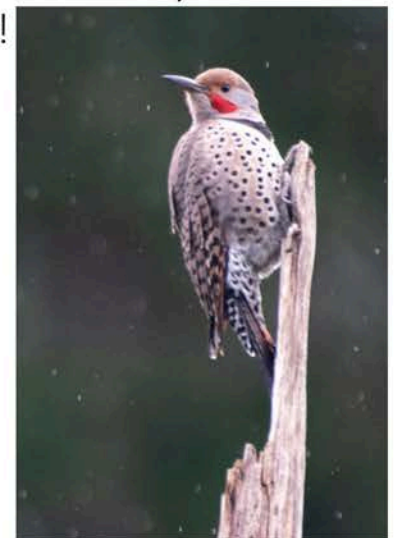
Canada Goose



Ring-necked Duck



Yellow-rumped Warbler



Northern Flicker

Photos: James MacKenzie
Taken on site at MARS

NEWSLETTER

MARS SUMMER RAFFLE

The annual MARS Raffle has begun, but under slightly different circumstances! This year, we invite you to visit our website or scan our QR code (found in this article, online, and at MARS) to buy your tickets. Tickets are \$10 each and all proceeds go towards supporting our rescue and rehabilitation efforts.



Prizes include Flights,
Hotel Stays,
Whale Watching,
Gift Certificates
and more!



**SCAN
THIS**
WITH YOUR
CAMERA

Point your phone camera to
this code to go directly to
the Raffle Box site



or go to
rafflebox.ca/raffle/mars



**PRIZES INCLUDE FLIGHTS, HOTEL STAYS, WHALE
WATCHING, GIFT CERTIFICATES AND MORE!**



NEWSLETTER

FEATURE BIRD

Black Turnstones (*Arenaria melanocephala*) are stocky, black and white shorebirds that scurry in groups along our rocky shores like chatty, camouflaged sea-mice. Sometimes their noisy calls are the only way to detect their presence. A species confined entirely to the Pacific Coast, their wintering range stretches in a narrow band along the coast from Southern Alaska to Northwestern Mexico.

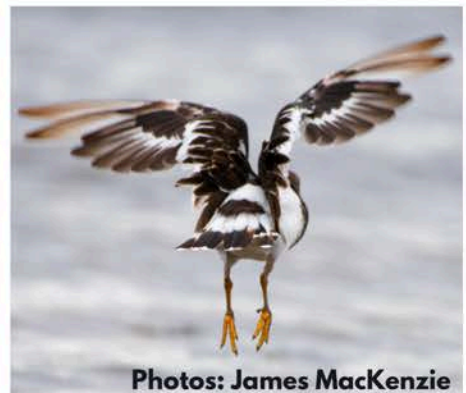


One small step for a Turnstone...

On the far Northern coastal sedge meadows where these birds breed, individuals show strong site and mate fidelity, which means birds often choose the same nesting area and mate as the year prior. Nesting in loose groups, Black Turnstone acts as a lookout, alerting the breeding bird community of any potential threats and going so far as to harass and attack much larger predatory intruders.



Coming in for landing with a Dunlin



Photos: James MacKenzie

Turnstone reverse angle

For any of us living on the Pacific Coast, the Black Turnstone is a bird to know. Expect these personable birds on our shores from September to April. Some excellent local spots to view these chatty shorebirds are at Point Holmes, Miracle Beach, Oyster Bay, and the Trent River Estuary!



NEWSLETTER

NATIVE PLANT FEATURE



Photo by: Jan Smith

Camas closeup



Photo by: Royal BC Museum

Camas growing in an Arbutus meadow

As you walk up to the Visitor Centre this May and June look to your left and prepare to be amazed. The stunning blue and yellow stars of the Common camas (*Camassia quamash*) are a treat for you and for the many pollinators buzzing around MARS. Camas are associated with Garry Oak ecosystems which are only found as remnants on Vancouver Island. These azure jewels are more than beautiful: the bulbs were carefully tended, harvested, and traded as a valuable starchy food source by generations of indigenous women on this coast. Members of the habitat stewardship team, Royann Petrel and Karen Cummins, planted 100 salvaged camas bulbs in 2020 and more again last year. We look forward to watching the swath of blue expand across our landscape into the future as our Garry Oak (*Quercus garryana*) trees continue to mature.

VOLUNTEER FEATURE



Our mascot Phoenix with Liz Williams



Clean up crew making MARS Clean & Green

The staff and volunteer Board of Directors would like to give a big 'Thank You' to longtime volunteer Liz Williams, who recently decided to step down from her volunteer administrative position. For about 15 years, Liz had the very important role of thanking donors with handwritten cards, providing tax receipts to donors, and entering all the associated information into our database. Other jobs Liz graciously took on included serving on the Special Events Committee, working at onsite and at community events, and completing wildlife patient data entry. When not at MARS, Liz loves to travel with her husband Tom to places including Mexico, Hawaii, and a particular favourite: Africa. Liz will remain volunteering at special events. Thank you Liz!

A major site-wide Spring cleanup happened on April 5th, when about 25 volunteers came to MARS to clean, clean, clean! Thank you all who came and helped out. A major thank you to Sharleen and Isaac, our two interns who moved on at the end of April. Good luck to both of you.