

Wildlife Care Network Presentation

RECOMMENDATION:

That Harbor Commission receives a presentation from the Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network, who rescues over 3,000 animals (including seabirds) per year.

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Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network, incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1988 rehabilitates wildlife as permitted by California Fish and Wildlife and Federal Fish and Wildlife regulations. The network receives over 3,000 animals per year that are at risk, orphaned, injured, sick, or oiled. Most of the animals are brought to us by members of the public, and city or county animal control. SBWCN relies heavily on volunteers to capture, transport, and care for songbirds, seabirds, small mammals, reptiles, and raptors. SBWCN could not accomplish its mission, to help wildlife in need and return them to the wild without the assistance of many organizations in the community, including the Harbor Patrol. We are fortunate to have many species of seabirds in our coastal community. Many of the seabirds that are reported in need of help, beach themselves on the boat launch ramp, the sandy area at the end of the board walk past SEA Landing, the sand spit and the pier. The Harbor Patrol, as time permits, makes sure that dogs are on leashes and that the birds are not being harassed when they are trying to rest. When approached by people or dogs they will dive back into the water for safety. The Harbor Patrol has been able to capture many of these seabirds, known as pelagic birds, those who spend most of their time in the ocean. Grebes, loons, cormorants and pelicans that have become oiled from natural seeps, injured from fish hooks or fishing line are too quick to take refuge in the water making their capture difficult. If Harbor Patrol has the time and ability to get the bird to net it, the bird is placed in a crate and SBWCN is called for pickup. There are other rehab organizations in the community and they sometimes rescue seabirds that end up in odd places; apartment buildings, middle of the freeway, parking lots, yards and inland areas. Other organizations that are permitted to rescue and rehab wildlife are Marine Mammal Center serving Santa Barbara, Channel Islands Marine Mammal & Wildlife Institute serving Ventura, Animal Rescue Team in Solvang and Ojai Raptor Center.

Once at the Center the bird is given a physical exam, the bird's body temperature is taken, the bird is weighed, and warmed on a heating pad if necessary. If the bird is in stable condition it is fed. If the bird is oiled and not stable it cannot be washed. Only a blood test can determine if the bird is strong enough to withstand the washing process which can take 20 or 30 minutes.

Once the bird is washed it is put in a net bottom pen with a hair dryer. The next step is to put the bird back into the water to check its water-proofing. If the bird's feathers become wet, the bird is dried and the process is repeated until the bird preens sufficiently to become water-proof. The bird must be able to stay in the water for 48 hours without becoming wet.

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If the bird's injury is treatable, such as hook or line entanglements, the foreign objects are removed, wounds are treated with disinfectant, and antibiotics may be prescribed. Compound fractures or broken bones at the joint indicate the need for euthanasia. However, conditions of fatigue due to malnutrition can be treated, as well as severe parasite loads. In the winter, storms may cause stress related injury, and in the spring juvenile pelicans flying over from their breeding grounds on Anacapa Island suffer weight loss as they learn to feed themselves. Environmental conditions may also play a role in the availability of food.

Wildlife rehabilitators receive ongoing training at conferences that are held once a year. Wildlife organizations such as the California Council of Wildlife Rehabilitation, CCWR, National Wildlife Rehabilitation Association and the IWRA, International Wildlife Rehabilitation Association, and The Oiled Wildlife Care Network help staff and volunteers develop skills in the field of rehabilitation from wrapping broken wings, hydration, and wound care, to extensive training in oil spill response as it applies to treating oiled wildlife, seabirds as well as mammals. The OWCN provides conferences as well as online webinar classes, and workshops to prepare volunteers to care for wildlife that has been contaminated by oil. This information is useful for rehabbers on the Central Coast due to the abundant natural seeps in the area. In the event of an actual oil spill the Coast Guard would assume command. The site is considered toxic as well as a crime scene. Anyone wishing to respond to an oil spill must be a volunteer associated with a permitted wildlife rehabilitation organization in order to undergo continued training required to respond in an oil spill.

Response to an oil spill is the responsibility of the Coast Guard to protect the area and prevent people from entering toxic sites, California Fish and Wildlife, the Oiled Wildlife Care Network, Oil Spill Prevention Response, and local organizations such as the Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network.

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