

WRNBC NETWORK NEWS



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Member Facility Update: Elizabeth's Wildlife Centre

Janelle and Jen VanderBeek

Elizabeth's Wildlife Centre (EWC) in Abbotsford encompasses a small scenic property that includes a beautiful wooded creek. Elizabeth Melnick is a resilient former nurse who, since 1986, has been single-handedly managing the operation with a band of dedicated volunteers. Whether by phone or in person, whether squirrel or swan, Elizabeth responds to the call for help with incredibly persistent patience.



Elizabeth Melnick, founder and lead rehabilitator of EWC since 1986.

Photo credit: Elizabeth Melnick

Late February 2016 saw the first orphan welcomed to EWC. During peak season, Elizabeth tube-fed more than 60 animals daily. In late October, the centre is still caring for injured wildlife, hand feeding squirrels and minding a pair of young rabbits. This year Elizabeth expects to care for 1,200 sick and injured wild animals. Success stories include an emaciated gosling, weak with pneumonia. Elizabeth had a positive feeling about the gosling, she says, and so she gave him 24 hours. Then another 24 hours. And another. The little gosling soon regained the strength to stand, walk and self-feed and was eventually released. Persistent patience paid off. Elizabeth also released a great blue heron, admitted suffering from a severe eye infection that required intensive care, including a one-week course of IV antibiotics. An orphaned merganser also spent time at EWC, regaining health and wellness while teaching basic life skills and fishing techniques to an orphaned mallard.

When asked about her success with orphaned rabbits, Elizabeth says that the key is to assign one sole caregiver to each litter. The babies adjust to their caregiver but remain wary of other humans. Elizabeth bottle feeds the babies as a preference, but tube-feeding is the solution for any that show resistance.

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Juvenile common merganser and mallard successfully raised at EWC.
Photo credit: Elizabeth Melnick

The biggest challenge at EWC is staffing. Elizabeth personally performs most of the administrative, clerical and rehabilitation tasks. She works the phones, writes the government grant proposals and cares for the animals. Volunteers assist with aspects of all the work. Government grants provided for the summer hiring of three students in 2016. Unfortunately, the grants only covered half the cost of the required summer's need. The bulk of the remaining summer positions were paid through the non-profit centre's funds.

In a facility in need of maintenance, with minimal staff and volunteer support, Elizabeth continues to harness her strength to push onwards and forwards to another day, another year, another life saved. Centres like EWC provide a great resource for the community of rehabilitators in B.C. that lends support through shared experience and encouragement, all working towards the same goal.

Tips and Tricks: Feeling Gull-ible?

Heather Schmitt

Hand feeding young gull chicks is often necessary, but it can be a little awkward to do so while minimizing contact with these impressionable patients. Puppets and other disguises create a helpful visual barrier, but can sometimes be tricky to create and operate (or just to keep clean!). This season at BC SPCA Wild Animal Rehabilitation Centre (Wild ARC), we tried out a simple gull 'sleeve' with an elastic top to disguise our hands and tweezers when feeding young gulls, and found it quite effective. The pattern is simple to duplicate if you have crafty staff or volunteers on your team, and we chose sturdy white canvas material that washed well. Check out our pattern in the linked PDF, and let us know if you discover any helpful variations if your centre tries it out this coming season!



A young gull being fed by a puppet sleeve.
Photo credit: Wild ARC staff

2017 WRNBC AGM Announcement!

The 2017 AGM host has been confirmed! The conference will take place in Victoria, B.C., on March 3-5, 2017. Thanks to BC SPCA Wild Animal Rehabilitation Centre (Wild ARC) for generously coming forward as a host! Registration information soon to follow. Those interested in presenting should contact Kim Reid at kimberly.reid@wrnbc.org. The registration fee is waived for presenters, so please consider sharing!

Seabird Transport Guide for the Public

Janelle VanderBeek via Wildlife Rescue Association Staff

Diving birds, including loons, auklets and grebes, are uniquely designed for life on the water. Legs positioned far back on the body allows for extra propulsion underwater, but prevent the bird from moving well on land. This unique anatomy means diving bird care and transport are specific and specialized. Housing that does not account for a diving bird's anatomy can result in lesions or pressure sores on the keel (sternum) and feet, wrist wounds from contact with the sides of the enclosure, and waterproofing issues. Below are instructions on safely housing, feeding and handling seabirds for the purposes of transport to a rehabilitation facility.

Housing

- Place in a warm, dark, silent area such as a closet or an unused bathroom.
- Use a sturdy, well-ventilated cardboard box or an appropriately sized kennel with the front opening blocked (use a towel or cardboard) during transport.
- Ideally, use an appropriately sized net-bottom kennel.
- Minimize contact; disturb the animal only if absolutely required such as when changing water or switching enclosures.
- Use ample layers of soft bedding (blankets, towels, etc.) to support the body while the bird is off water.
- Roll a towel tightly into a U-shape and tuck it in around the bird, hugging the sides and chest. This will help keep the bird clean when it defecates.



Proper kennel setup for a pied-billed grebe.
Photo credit: Paul Steeves

- DO NOT use paper, tissue, wood shavings, etc. Improper bedding increases the likelihood of fungal lung infection such as aspergillosis.
- Change bedding regularly; compromised or soiled feathers are detrimental to the bird's health.
- If the feathers become soiled, DO NOT attempt to wash the bird. Provide fresh bedding, keep the bird warm and monitor for signs of distress (open-mouth breathing, lethargy, etc.).
- To alleviate stress and to minimize human contact, prepare a second enclosure and transfer the bird.
- DO NOT allow the bird to swim in a pool of water.

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Food/water

- Supply a bowl of fresh water, small enough to prevent the bird from sitting in it. Remove water overnight.
- At any time, if the bird appears wet, remove the water dish and increase the room temperature until the bird has completely dried.
- If transport to a wildlife rehabilitation facility will take less than 24 hours, DO NOT attempt to feed the bird. If transport will take more than 24 hours, call a rehabilitator for feeding advice.
- DO NOT supply fish (in any form) as this food will likely be unidentifiable to the bird, and will put the bird's feather condition/waterproofing at risk.
- Change water regularly, and immediately if it looks at all soiled.

Handling

- The least amount of handling possible is advised. DO NOT hug, pet or speak to the animal as this causes severe stress.



Proper handling technique of a western grebe without a towel over the head.

Photo credit: Paul Steeves

- Wear protective gear, including goggles or safety glasses and gloves (latex, nitrile, rubber, etc.).
- Cover the bird with a towel. Hold the wings gently but securely against the bird's body. Hold the bird against your body at hip height.
- Gently control the bird, securing either the base of the head or holding the bill through the towel; be aware of the location of the nares (nostrils are usually situated at the top of the beak) so as not to block them.
- Carefully place into a fresh, clean enclosure.
- If you notice any injury, please try to take a picture and email this to a rehabilitator, or be ready to describe the injury.

Please contact a rehabilitation facility such as Wildlife Rescue Association (604-526-7275) with any questions or concerns or use the members-only section of the website (www.wrnbc.org/members-only/) to share information.

The What, Why and How of SOPs

Ana Mendes

What is an SOP?

A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is a set of fixed instructions or steps for carrying out routine operations. These rules provide structure and framework to an organization with multiple employees and/or volunteers.

Alternative paperwork:

Protocols: detailed plan of a scientific or medical experiment, treatment or procedure

Policies: course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organization or individual

Procedure: *who, what, where, when and how* a task should be completed

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- **Scope:** *What* is the intention/purpose of the procedure
- **Responsibility:** *Who* performs the procedure
- **PPE:** Necessary *safety equipment*
- **Materials:** *Items* needed to perform the procedure
- **References:** Any *external resources* or guides used
- **Definitions:** Any special terminology used that needs *clarification* for the user
- **Procedure:** Step-by-step how-to *list* for completing the task

How to write an SOP:

With pen and paper in hand, sit and think. Go through the motions of the procedure and jot down in point form the steps you are going through from start to finish. Next, open up the template and begin to fill in the 'easy' categories (PPE and materials). Type out your quick list in the procedural category. If you can come up with a scope or responsibility at this time, go ahead, though it may be easier to leave for last. Gather your references if needed and start writing out each procedural step in full. Make sure to document your references.

Congratulations, your rough draft is complete! Now you can review it several times, have peers and managers review it, and edit it as needed. When finished, print the final draft, sign it and have the manager sign it so it can be filed away in an SOP manual.

Why develop an SOP?

An SOP will serve as framework for organizational policy – providing direction and structure. Having SOPs will provide written documentation of best practice, recording present knowledge and experience for other rehabilitators. SOPs can build a foundation for job descriptions, training, disciplinary action and performance review.

Building a SOP library will begin to standardize processes, assuring consistent work across employees and volunteers. The resource that SOPs provide reduces questions and improves training practices. These SOPs can be shared across centres, improving best care practices. Expectations of employees can be documented using SOPs, keeping workers accountable and ensuring best patient care by providing step by step instructions.

Helpful hints:

Start with what you have. Use current protocols or start with small daily tasks that you are confident performing (e.g. cleaning songbird enclosures). Find where your task fits. Not everything needs an SOP; surgeries and rescues cannot be predicted and therefore cannot have SOPs. When a task includes "ifs," a policy or protocol may be more fitting. An example SOP on fecal flotations is in a linked PDF.

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In the Media: Wild Bear Rescue

Angelika Langen

In the spring of 2016, Northern Lights Wildlife Society (NLWS) signed an agreement with the Vancouver-based film company Omni to produce a 12-part series about the day-to-day aspects of a B.C. wildlife shelter. The aim of NLWS is to educate the public about the merits and limitations of wildlife rehabilitation.

Reaching this point was a two-year process of long discussions to ensure that the rehabilitation process would not be jeopardized by adding a film crew. In our case, we ended up with one cameraman for the animal shots, which showed to have basically no impact on the animals. After the initial introduction, the cameraman was of no interest as he was neither providing feed nor interaction. Our animals basically ignored him completely.

The process of producing a series cost a lot of time and commitment on behalf of all the people working at NLWS. At times it was trying, but mostly it was exhilarating to share what we do and see the reactions of the editing staff and others involved. The series will air in the spring of 2017 on Animal Planet Canada.



Cameramen Brad and Nick Quinville setting up the perfect framing.

Photo credit: Angelika Langen



NLWS team member Tonya Landry assisting the crew in preparing for a release.

Photo credit: Angelika Langen

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Wildlife Rehabilitator Exchange Program!

Is your centre interested in learning how other facilities run? Do you want to learn about patients you don't normally treat? If so, please complete the attached quiz so that we can make exchanges easy for everyone. Questions can be emailed to info@wrnbc.org.

Germ Review: Avian Pox Virus

Kimberly Reid



Photo credit: Christina Carrières

Wildlife rehabilitators around the world are familiar with the skin lesions indicative of avipoxvirus, more commonly known as Avian Pox. There are many species of the avian pox virus, each with its own host species that can be infected. The most common host species in B.C. are raptors and passerines. Avian pox virus is both *endemic*, with the disease always present at low levels within populations, and *emerging*, showing an increase in the incidence of the disease, and an increasing diversity of host species that it can infect.

Avian pox viruses are spread through vectors (including mosquitoes and other blood sucking parasites), and through contact of abraded skin with a contaminated surface. Outbreaks in the wild are linked closely to environmental conditions that influence populations of vector species and survival of the virus outside of the host.

In the rehabilitation setting, outbreaks of avian pox virus are linked mainly to environmental contamination. Since the virus is resistant to drying, it can persist for extended periods in dust and dander, and on perches, cage surfaces, dishes and even on human clothing. Isolating the patient and following strict disinfection protocols are necessary to prevent the virus from spreading.

Preventing the spread of avian pox also necessitates early identification of the disease. A presumptive diagnosis of avian pox can be made from gross examination of the lesions. In *cutaneous form*, the most common form of the disease, featherless areas of the body (the feet and legs, skin at the base of the beak, the margins of the eyes, etc.) develop small white/yellow/pinkish wart-like nodules that enlarge and cluster. A more infrequent form of the disease, the *diphtheritic form*, affects mucous membranes, causing the host to develop nodules in digestive and respiratory tracts. Both forms can result in difficulty eating and breathing, and lead to weakness, emaciation and secondary infection. Immature birds are more susceptible and symptoms typically present more severe than in adults.



Photo credit: http://wildlifedisease.unbc.ca/avian_pox.htm

Encouragingly, the disease is self-limiting and a patient can heal with supportive care, control of secondary infections and by preventing re-infection. Even so, avian pox virus remains an increasing threat to birds in B.C. and around the world.

Ask your veterinarian or connect with rehabilitators through the members-only section of the website to help you in developing the best in-practice protocols and to share your successes.

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