

Stanislaus Flyer

Fall

Stanislaus Wildlife Care Center

2022

The Mission of SWCC is to promote respect for wildlife and increase the public's awareness of the importance of preserving wildlife through the care of injured and orphaned California native wild animals and community education.

Inside this issue...

Creature Feature	Pg 1
Avian Influenza Outbreak	Pg 2
More Avian Influenza	Pg 2
Pond Renovations	Pg 3
Stainless Steel Counters	Pg 4
Cindy Manning	Pg 5
Squirrels & More Squirrels	Pg 6

SWCC Staff

Executive Director
Donna Burt

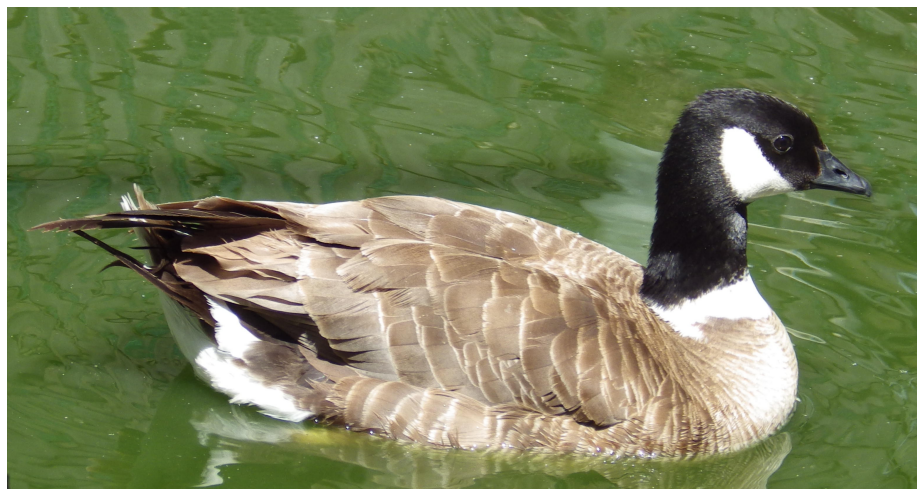
Animal Care Manager
Veronica Sandow

Animal Care Coordinators
Duane Dahl
Alyssa Washburn
Michelle Mason

Board of Directors

Janice Lookabaugh	Chairperson
Linda Weidman	Vice-Chair
Cindy Manning	Treasurer
Dorothy Tuggle	Secretary
Phil McKay	Member
Jennifer Gowans	Member
Dr. Doug Marks	Veterinarian
Donna Burt	Executive Director

Creature Feature Aleutian Cackling Goose



Aleutian Cackling Goose

By Janice Lookabaugh

In December 2016, an adult Aleutian cackling goose (*Branta hutchinsii leucopareia*) was brought to the center. The last part of the wing was missing, with dead bone sticking out. It underwent surgery at Monte Vista Small Animal Hospital, where Dr. Marks repaired the wing. Because the goose is missing part of its wing, it cannot fly.

We tried twice to place it in zoos, but both placements fell through. The goose wasn't a problem and seemed happy in our pond. It has been living there ever since.

Aleutian cackling geese are a small subspecies of the cackling goose. They were once thought to be a subspecies of the much larger Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*). Cackling geese look similar to Canada geese but are smaller, only slightly larger than mallard ducks. The Aleutian cackling goose is distinguished by a prominent white ring at the base of the neck, a lighter chest, and a smaller, slightly curved beak.

These geese have an interesting history. They breed on the Aleutian Islands and overwinter in California. The Aleutian Islands extend west from southwest Alaska toward Russia.

Aleutian geese were decimated by Arctic foxes, which were introduced into the Aleutian Islands by Russian fur traders. They were thought to be extinct until a small colony was discovered on Buldir Island in 1962.

continued on page 5

Avian Influenza Outbreak

By Doug Marks DVM

There is an outbreak of avian influenza (bird flu) in our area. Avian influenza is found in many wildlife species, especially waterfowl. Domestic birds like chickens, turkeys, and ducks can become ill or die from the disease. This disease can be a serious threat to our local turkey and chicken ranches. It can also be passed on to mammals like foxes and raccoons as well as people.

There are several strains of Avian Influenza. Some are common and seldom cause birds to die. This particular strain (HPAI H5N1) is very contagious and much more lethal than previous strains. It has been found in other parts of the world for several years but was only detected in the US around 2016. This is the first year it has been found in California.

The SWCC first noticed this disease in newly admitted Canada geese. Then birds started dying in the pond.

We had to change our admitting procedures. We no longer bring waterfowl into the building. This allows these animals to be isolated from other animals.

The disease is transmitted through bodily fluids, commonly saliva, urine, and feces. Although this makes it safer than an airborne disease, it is still very easy to come in contact with saliva and excrement when handling waterfowl.

Special precautions are also being taken to protect the center's staff, as avian flu can be transmitted to humans. These include wearing gloves, gowns, face shields, and/or masks as needed.

Unfortunately, ducks and geese with symptoms of avian influenza must be euthanized. This disease is fatal once obvious symptoms start.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife provided testing for some of the birds that died to determine the extent of the disease. Avian influenza was diagnosed in geese from Donnelly Park and California State University Stanislaus.

Avian influenza has been found in wild birds throughout most of the state. The full extent of the outbreak is not known because birds have not been tested in many areas.

This HPAI N5N1 is unlikely to go away. The wildlife populations will adapt. There may be die-offs of birds, but resistant individuals should survive and breed, passing on their ability to survive the disease.

However, we will continue to receive sick ducks and geese, so our new procedures will continue for a long time.



More Avian Influenza

By Donna Burt

The Avian Influenza outbreak is forcing us to change the way we handle almost all of our animals.

In the past, baby ducks were kept in the baby bird room for a week or two, then transferred to brooders, then to the pond. We will no longer bring ducks or geese into the hospital. We have also set up a triage tent outside so animals can be examined before they are taken into the hospital. Although this will not be used for all animals, it will be used for all waterfowl and any other animals with possible symptoms.

We plan to set up another tent for baby ducks outside the back door. Although baby ducks are usually healthy, we don't want to take any chances.

We have built one 6' x 10' duck quarantine enclosure. We will need at least three more to keep groups of ducks and geese isolated until they can go into the pond. These are about \$600 each. They aren't fancy and probably won't last too many years, but we are still figuring out how to keep the waterfowl and the rest of the animals safe.

We have instituted much stricter bio-security measures for all animals. We have purchased rain boots for employees and volunteers. They must be worn when entering any outside cages. Either disposable foot covers or foot baths must be used.

We do general clean and feed in a specific order. First, the resident animals. Then the general rehab animals. Last, the waterfowl.

And last, we can no longer accept domestic ducks or geese.

Next spring, when all the baby animals start coming in, will be a real challenge. But we hope to have the staff trained and procedures in place to prevent any healthy animals from being infected.

Supplies We Need

Paper Towels
Scrub Brushes
Puppy Pads
13 gal plastic garbage bags
Dishwashing Gloves (S & M)
Visit our Amazon Wish List for other ideas.

Volunteers & Money

Pond Renovations

By Donna Burt

In September, we had several ducks and geese die in our pond within a few days of each other. That has never happened before. We also received several geese with neurological problems. They twisted their heads around and had poor balance. Some were in convulsions. They came from areas where other dead geese had been found. They tested positive for Avian Influenza.

This was a serious problem with no easy solution. Since there is no treatment for Avian Influenza, all we could do was wait and see how many of the thirty-eight birds in the pond would die.

Fortunately, only nine died.



Pond Before Renovations

Of course, ducks don't do well on concrete, so we will cover the area around the pond with products like DriDek that are easy on duck feet.

The pond is now only eighteen inches deep with gently sloping sides, enough for ducks to swim, and much safer for people who have to catch the ducks.

We also added about four feet to one side of the enclosure. Before, there was less than a foot between the water and the fence. Now, not only do the ducks have more room, but people can walk safely along that side of the pond.

Someday, we will redesign the fencing so the support posts can be removed.

The project will cost about \$14,000. Thankfully we have a donor (who wishes to remain anonymous) who generously paid for the pond renovation.

But the pond is only the beginning of the Avian Influenza renovations and changes.



Pouring the Cement Liner

We were told to wait six weeks. If no more birds died, we were free to release the remaining birds. Presumably, they had recovered and were no longer contagious. We released all but three, an Aleutian goose, a pintail, and a Ross's goose - all non-releasable.

Now the pond was empty, but there was no way to decontaminate it. The concrete liner holding the water was extremely rough and had about two feet of gravel in the bottom.

Although the virus dies fairly quickly when dry and warm, it can live for quite a while in cool, moist environments. Getting the gravel clean was impossible.

The area around the pond was gravel over dirt mixed with duck and goose droppings. Although we remove and replace the substrate regularly, there was no way to decontaminate that area except by letting the summer sun bake it for a while. That is not practical with winter coming on.

What if we get another outbreak?

We hired a contractor to renovate the pond. He put in a new concrete liner to hold the water. It is smooth enough to dry and disinfect. He also concreted the entire area around the pond.

If we get another outbreak, we can remove the ducks and water, clean and disinfect the entire area, and replace the ducks within a few days.



Almost Finished

The filtering system still needs to be installed.

Stainless Steel Counters

By Donna Burt

It seems strange to get excited about counter tops but we have wanted to upgrade for years.

Last year we received \$14,000 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Voluntary Tax Contribution Fund. We used that money to install stainless steel counters and drain trays in the kitchen and the baby bird room.

We also upgraded the sinks to larger, three compartment sinks. And bought much nicer faucets.

Both of these sinks are used constantly every day. There are lots of dishes to wash and dry. We don't dry the dishes with a cloth. That is time consuming and creates even more laundry. Instead we put the dishes in racks and let them air dry.

They drip.

Now we have slanted shelves that let the drips drain back into the sink, keeping the counters dry.

Because they got so much use, the old Formica counters needed to be replaced every few years. The stainless counters should last as long as the building holds up. And they are easier to clean.



Before



Installing the Kitchen Counters



The Baby Bird Room Counter and Sink



The Kitchen Counter and Sink
Daily food prep.



Open an Amazon Smile account and designate the SWCC as your charity. It's the same as a regular Amazon account except they donate a percentage of each purchase to us.

You don't pay anything extra, and we get some, much-needed money

DONATE YOUR CAR, TRUCK OR BOAT

It's Easy

**Tax Receipt Given
Not running OK
FREE PICK UP
Call 877-411-3662**

Cindy Manning

By Donna Burt

In early 2019, Cindy Manning was hired as our executive director. She did a wonderful job with the scheduling, accounting, purchasing, and other management duties.

This may sound like a simple job, but nothing at the center is simple. We have too many different kinds of animals, each with its own requirements. We have both volunteers and employees to manage.

Even accounting is not simple. We have to rely on donations, so income doesn't always match expenses. After all, we can't charge our patients for their care.

The number of employees and the number of hours they work changes throughout the year making scheduling complicated.

Cindy has retired as executive director and has taken over the job of treasurer, giving her more time to spend with her family.

Cindy has worked with many kinds of animals, but baby songbirds are her favorites. She homecares doves and does most of the songbird releases. The releases may sound easy, but they are rather complex.

She comes in very early to catch the birds. Since not all birds in an aviary are ready for release, they all must be caught and examined. Before a bird can be released, it must have good feathers, be in good body weight, and be old enough.



Using the numbers on their leg bands, she compares each bird to its records to determine its age and where the bird should be released. This can take a while. There are seven songbird aviaries.

On release days, the lobby slowly fills up with carriers, each labeled with a location.

We want to thank Cindy for her hard work over the past twenty-two years and welcome her as our new treasurer.

Aleutian Cackling Goose continued from page 1.

The foxes were removed from several islands, including Buldir. Some geese were relocated from Buldir to those islands. Geese from captive flocks were also released to mate with the wild ones. By 1967 there were still only a few hundred Aleutian geese.

But each year, the number of geese increased. In 2001, Aleutian geese were removed from the endangered species list. By 2008 there were 114,000 Aleutian geese.

Aleutian geese arrive in California in mid-October. Most spend the fall and winter in the Central Valley on two privately owned ranches and on the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge. However, since 2002, a small number have spent this time on the northern California coast.

Around late December, those spending the winter in the Central Valley begin moving north, and by mid-February, most are in northwestern California. They leave for the Aleutian Islands in mid-April.

These geese are strong swimmers, divers, and flyers, are highly social, and are usually seen in groups. During the breeding season, males are very aggressive towards intruders, even humans, who get too close to the nest or young. They typically mate for life, starting at two years old.

In the wild, they can live ten to twenty-five years. Captive birds can live 35-40 years.

In the wild, many die from heavy metal poisoning picked up from contaminated mining sites, eating lead shot left behind during the hunting season, and from lead fishing weights.

Our Aleutian goose survived the Avian influenza epidemic in our pond and still seems healthy and happy. The good news is that it will soon be going to the Los Angeles Zoo, where it can live out its life.



Squirrels, Squirrels & More Squirrels

By Donna Burt

Unlike most animals, tree squirrels' main breeding season is in the fall. A few pairs have babies in the spring, but most tree squirrels have babies in the fall.

Just when the baby season is finally over, the tree squirrels pour in. Right now, we are overrun with squirrels.

This area has three kinds of tree squirrels: Eastern grey squirrels, Western grey squirrels, and Eastern fox squirrels.

Eastern grey squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) are the smallest of the three. They have brownish gray backs and tails with white bellies and a reddish strip along their sides. Their tails may have a bit of red in them. They are native to the Eastern US but have been introduced to every state, Great Britton, Australia, and many other parts of the world. They also come in black.



Young Eastern Fox Squirrel.
His tail and belly will get redder as he gets older.

Eastern fox squirrels (*Sciurus niger*) are larger with reddish-brown backs, red bellies, and red tails. They are native to the eastern US but have been introduced into California and other states.

Western grey squirrels (*Sciurus griseus*) have gray backs and tails and white bellies. They don't have any red or brown fur. They are the largest squirrel in California. Competition with Eastern gray and Eastern Fox squirrels has caused their population to decline.



Young Western Grey Squirrels

Not only do they lack any red or brown in their fur but their ears are bigger than the other squirrels. Although that isn't obvious in this picture.

We take extra special care of our Western grey squirrels. We don't get as many Western greys as the other species. They are very slow to develop, taking a full six weeks to open their eyes and another six weeks to begin to eat solid food. And an additional twelve weeks or so before they are ready for release.

All photos by Donna Burt



Young Eastern Grey Squirrel

The face and feet will become a brighter orangish-red as he gets older.



Young Eastern Grey Squirrel - Black Phase

A few of the black squirrels are totally black, but most have golden speckles.

Moving??

If your address changes, please let us know. Send in the membership form or email:
SWCCenter@StanislausWildlife.org

Membership Form

Name _____ Date _____

Street _____ Phone() _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail Address _____

_____ No Receipt _____ Email Receipt _____ Mailed Receipt

___ New Membership ___ Membership Renewal ___ General Donation ___ Restricted Donation

___ \$20 Individual ___ \$30 Family ___ \$50 Grantor ___ \$100 Sustaining ___ \$500 Contributor ___ \$1000 Donor Other \$ _____

All donations are tax deductible and gratefully accepted. Please consult your tax advisor.

Make checks payable to: SWCC, P.O. Box 298, Hughson, CA 95326 - THANK YOU!

Please email SWCCenter@StanislausWildlife.org if you would like to volunteer.

The SWCC does not sell or give addresses to anyone!

Fall 2022

Stanislaus Wildlife Care Center
P.O. Box 298
Hughson, CA
95326 209-883-9414
SWCCenter@stanislauswildlife.org
www.stanislauswildlife.org

NON-PROFIT ORG
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 278
MODESTO, CA

