

island wildlife

N A T U R A L C A R E C E N T R E



Fall 2008

Q&A

with Wildlife Centre founder, Jeff Lederman

How did one person create such a facility?

This has been anything but a one man show. While it is true that I have been the common thread running through the past 12 years, there have been so many significant people both short term and in the long term that are just as responsible for this achievement. I don't know if we would still be here if not for the constant efforts of Jackie Ballerone over the last 8 years. French veterinarian, Marielle Bonnet, has been in charge of our seal program for 6 years. Barb Conyers has been our lonely winter staff member for as long as I can remember. It would take an entire issue of this newsletter for me to credit everyone responsible for this great facility.

What was your inspiration?

In all honesty, this centre grew out of an inability for me to coexist at other established centres in The States. I was unaware of this, but it seems that I don't play well with others. I don't compromise well, I don't like the status quo, I don't say things like, "that's close enough". Wildlife care is an endeavour that begs for perfection. It is very black and white. An animal lives or it dies. It is releasable or it's not. There is no grey area. If you set the bar low, your wild patients don't thrive and you might want to find something else to do with your time. In the end I just got tired of saying that if this were my facility I would do this better or differently.

What is your mandate?

Our mandate is quite simple. We rescue injured, sick and orphaned wildlife with the express purpose of guiding them back to wellness with the goal of returning them healthy and strong back to the wild. If an animal will not survive in the wild due to injuries or handicaps, we respectfully and painlessly send them on to their next life. We do not put animals in permanent captivity or on public display. While life is important, we feel quality of life is more important.

Why natural care?

It's really just an extension of how I approach my own health. If I were injured or sick I would more often than not, seek out an alternative practitioner such as an herbalist, acupuncturist or physical therapist. I had a great experience with a Homeopath about 25 years ago and that has stuck with me. I thought, wouldn't it be great to run a wildlife centre that was completely holistic. That quickly proved to be a fantasy, but what we have achieved is a great balance of alternative medicine and conventional veterinary protocols. It doesn't have to be all one or the other. In the end, saving the life of the animal is all that counts. But, if you can achieve that end in a less toxic, less invasive or less stressful manner, that's our direction.

What sorts of animals are rescued?

We care for any wild animal that you would find in this region. No animal is too small and no animal is too common or insignificant. From tiny Kinglets to California Sea Lions, we attempt to give them everything they need to fully recover their independence and their ability to once again survive in the wild. To this end we have built an impressive facility, from a small veterinary care clinic to a huge eagle flight cage. We have sea bird enclosures and song bird gazebos. There are fawn pens and otter pools. And most impressive of all are our seal pup facilities. An intensive care unit that safely houses 50 pups struggling to survive and 7 nursery and pre-release pools have made it possible for us to rehabilitate more than 200 seals in the last 2 summers alone.

Why so many Harbour Seal pups?

It is not that there are so many Harbour Seals in need, but rather so few facilities to care for them. Permits to rescue and rehabilitate marine mammals are issued by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. For this entire country there are only 2 facilities that have been granted permits to rescue marine mammals. Our Salt Spring centre is one of those facilities. Furthermore, Island Wildlife is the only year-round facility. This is a huge

responsibility. Canada has a really checkered history when it comes to seals. There used to be a bounty paid for Harbour Seal noses. Still, on the east coast of Canada, continues the largest wild animal slaughter in the world! What better way to show your disgust for those activities than to support efforts to save seals in our own back yard.

Where do the animals come from?

Most of our animals are rescued throughout the Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island. There is an occasional rescue from the mainland and every year from as far away as Prince Rupert.

Why do you interfere, why not let nature take its course?

I am always amazed by that notion that we are interfering with nature's grand scheme of survival of the fittest. Probably 90% of the animals that come into rehabilitation centres have had some kind of traumatic interaction with humans. Wild animals are hit by cars, collide with windows, are tangled in fencing, mauled by cats and dogs, poisoned, shot, trapped, electrocuted...I could go on and on. Somehow this is all an unfortunate yet acceptable cost of modern life. But when a small handful of dedicated people devote their lives to mitigating a fraction of this suffering, we are said to be interfering. And as for nature taking its course, what is natural in any of that? Is it natural for a seal pup to starve to death because its mother was shot near a fish farm? Is it natural for a fawn to suffer a slow death because its mother is lying in a ditch?

How much does it cost?

For the last few years our operating budget has been around \$225,000. This means that every single year, we have to raise almost a quarter of a million dollars. This is not a budget that allows for improvement of facilities, purchase of a new rescue vehicle or cost of living increases for staff. This is bare bones, keep the doors open.

Where does the money come from?

Our money comes from a variety of sources, but is basically split between grants from foundations and private donations. Your response to this newsletter makes up the largest portion of the private donations. We have also been fortunate enough to have a donor we refer to as our Salt Spring angel. Without her annual support we would have fallen on hard times a long time ago. Another generous donor and past intern is Pilar Bauta. Pilar and her family have supported a number of projects with an emphasis on our internship program. Grants from foundations are difficult to secure, time consuming to pursue and frequently feels more like winning a small lottery as opposed to funding you can count on year after year. One exception to this is the Brigitte Bardot Foundation. Every year a Bardot Foundation donation pays for the bulk of our seal's fish diet. This is more significant than it sounds when you consider that we purchase 30,000 to 40,000 pounds of frozen herring each year.

What do you see for the future?

By nature I'm a bit of a worrier. And in all honesty, the future has me feeling panicky. I have just been downloading funding guidelines from our supporting foundations and I'm reading things like this; "Like many organizations, we have been dramatically affected by the recent extreme volatility in stock markets around the world. These larger forces are affecting our ability, at least in the short term, to do all the good work we would normally undertake for our community." If this turns out to be the mind-set of our private donors, those of you reading this newsletter, we are in serious trouble. If our annual donors skip a year, if the \$500 donations become \$250 donations and if the number of new supporters is not what we hope, then this can only lead to serious cutbacks in the service we can offer. Or even worse, the closure of the centre. I've often heard that a large percentage of people are only 2 or 3 pay cheques away from being homeless. The same is true for The Wildlife Centre. We have no ability to cope with serious financial setbacks. This is the only wildlife care centre this region has ever seen, and is most likely the only one we ever will. It's worth your support.

"We see animals as independent lives, not as populations. If we can prevent the needless suffering of a single animal, then we have done important work."

Ed Harris skilfully restrains this large Bald Eagle so that wildlife staff can gently tube feed a liquid diet directly into the birds' stomach. Severely injured in Tofino, this unfortunate bird of prey was not long for this world. The bird was starving to death and it did not take long for our staff to discover why. The eagle's crop (or oesophagus) had been sliced open, perhaps in a dispute with another eagle. Everything that went in her mouth came out her neck. Emergency surgery was performed by Dr. Ilija Lukic, the oesophagus was cleaned up and sutured closed. At The Centre, liquid tube feedings continued but gradually small soft pieces of salmon were added to the diet. Eventually the eagle's normal diet was restored, long term exercise in flight cages built her back up to a robust bird and she was returned by helicopter to her home turf.

For the last 6 years Ed and his wife Linda have been a prolific rescue and transport partnership. Together they are an integral part of our wildlife rescue network. Regardless of the time of day or the time of year, if there is an animal in trouble, Ed and Linda are in their car and under way in minutes. Hundreds of animals owe their lives to Ed and Linda and we are blessed to have them as part of our team.



Bruised and starving by the side of the road, this Great Horned Owl looks fierce even at its most vulnerable moment. Its condition was life threatening, but once given a safe environment and a steady diet of rodents and fish, the owl made a quick recovery.



Seal team leader, Marielle Bonnet, rescues orphaned seal pup "Waikiki" while scuba diving this fall in Victoria.

On the Cover

Because of confusion caused by much misinformation regarding orphaned seal pups, dying pup "Anatolian" was watched on a Galiano beach until his rescuer was shocked into action by a Turkey Vulture devouring its eye ball! The pup was snatched up just before the bird of prey could totally blind the orphan. Besides a hideous injury, the pup was more than 10 days old and weighed only 15 pounds. The intense care that Island Wildlife is famous for was the pup's only chance for survival. 2 1/2 months later, he was a healthy 57 pounds. One eyed Harbour Seals do well in the wild, so in early August, Anatolian went back into the ocean as pictured on our cover.

Orphaned by a building demolition that crushed their mother, four tiny otter kits were rescued by the construction crew. Workers with shovels uncovered the four tiny siblings buried in the rubble. Only a few days old, these helpless babies received around the clock feedings as they adjusted to life in one of IWNCC's neonatal incubators. Housed at a constant 102 degrees, the little otters were bottle fed a special milk replacement formula every 3 to 4 hours, around the clock. These otters were so young that it would be almost 3 weeks before they even opened their eyes. Unfortunately, days later, the 2 tiniest succumbed to respiratory problems. The 2 stronger kits were later transferred to Critter Care, a facility for long term care of small mammals.



Extraordinary People

We spend so much time focused on our wild patients that we sometimes lose sight of the dedicated humans, supportive communities and generous funding partners that are the very heart of our organization. It takes an extraordinary person to spend day in and day out working in this stressful world. There's no glamour, fame or fortune. The return is often just a glimpse of the hind end of a healthy animal released back into the wild. It takes an extraordinary person to leave their busy life behind at the drop of a hat in order to help us rescue or transport an animal. It takes an extraordinary community to continuously provide enough funding to care for the hundreds of needy creatures each and every year. We can never thank these people, businesses and foundations enough.

Our 911 Volunteers Christiane Angell, Dr Ken Aylard, BC Ferries, Maj Birch & Mountaineer Avian Rescue, Dr. Brenda Bernhardt, Melodie Berreth, Courtenay Botton, Claire Bouchard, Wendy Brown, Nathan Cardinal, Chemainus Animal Hospital, Critter Care Wildlife Society, Tammy Chambers, the Coast Guard Auxiliarys, Cobble Hill Animal Hospital, John Cowan, Miranda & Kim Darwin, Cornelia Deaton, Barbara Debrough, Brian Declaire, Delta SPCA, Charrone & Chris Douglas, Duncan Animal Hospital, Michael Dunn, Duncan SPCA, Michelle Fairbanks & Jeffery Dickinson, Gavin Ellis, Clay Evans, Robin Ferry, Dave Foreman, Kris Fullbrook, Gabriola Vet Clinic, Jennifer Goodbrand, Gorge Rowing Centre, Cpt. Paul Grey, GROWLS, John Grundy, Ann Hadaway & Bob Bruce, Terry & Jess Hansen, Diane Hardacker, Dawn & Carla Henderson, Andrew Higgs, Barbara Hill, Constable Mike Holmes, Linda Hood, Natasha Horne, Patricia & Mel Huggins, Ken Hunter, Jasmyn, John Jefferson, Anne Jones, Sybille Jones, Debbie King, Reg Kirkham, Renee Koplan, Brian & Louise Krasowski, Ladysmith Animal Hospital, Lady Minto Hospital, Lightening Press, Trevor Mathews, Deb McGovern, John MacKenzie, Bill Mattin, Doug Maynard, Mill Bay Animal Hospital, Martin & Pawli Model, Ken Morissette, Beth Morris & Jim Chapman, Gord Murphy, Nanaimo SPCA, Helen & Bob Nation, Ruby Neubauer, Jim & Joanne Nichol, Orphaned Wildlife Rehabilitation Society, Kiyo Okuda, Parksville SPCA, Rosemary Partridge, Pender Power Squadron, Roger Pilkington, Brenda Plaxton, Ru Pope, Port Alberni SPCA, Prevost Vet Clinic, Cynthia Pronick, Raymond Proudlove, Charlene Reinhold, Christina Richard, Nicole Riepl, Nina Roslovic, the SSI school boat drivers, SSI RCMP, Tanya Schissler, Thomas Schnare, Mark Shaw, Sean Smith, Sue Smith, Dr. Maureen Stone, Pam Sutherland, Linda Taylor, Jan Thomas, Undersea Gardens, the Vancouver Aquarium, Victoria Harbour Patrol, Wild ARC, Michelle Williams-Krasnicki, Lyle Wilson, Karen Wolst, Lon Wood, Sheila Wowchuck, Zeuss.

Significant Others An extra special thanks to Pilar Bauta for jumping in wholeheartedly with a generous grant towards our Internship program; Greg Dombowsky for his great website expertise; the Ganges Village Market who are undoubtedly

Transport boaters and drivers are needed in all regions.

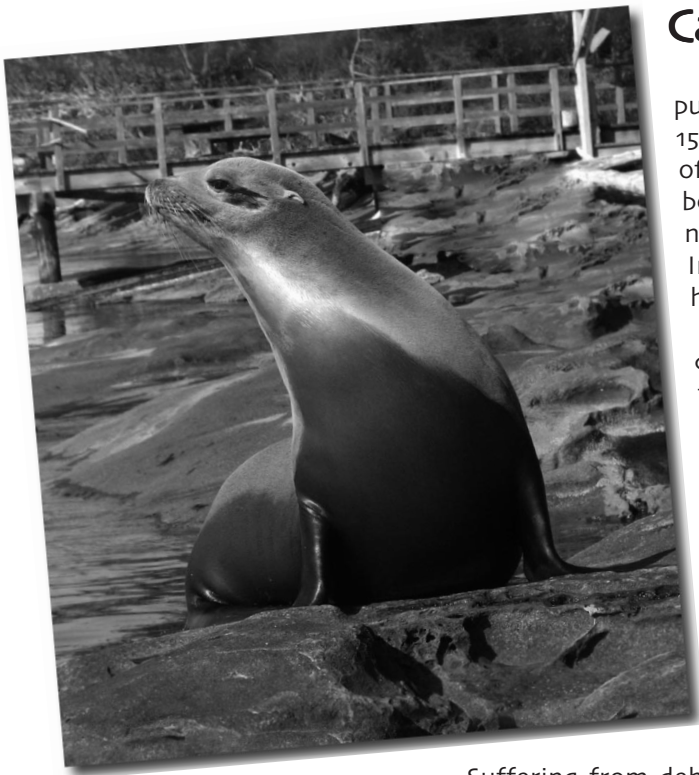
the most supportive local business in the Gulf Islands; Marit McBride who keeps tabs on our GVM receipts; Pharmasave; Sam Graci for keeping us in Greens+; Jim Kearly of Growler Cove for always making sure we have herring in our freezer. And to a few individuals who really go that extra mile to help with the animals: Derek Astbury, Pat Brown-Clayton & Janice Leach, Dave Hargreaves, Mike Hoebel, Renee Koplan, Sheila Lake, Liz Ciocea and all the volunteers from GROWLS, Richard Krieger, Phil Kuys, Tawny Mollard, Chuck Rennie and Elizabeth Wilkes. Huge thanks to pilot Norm Snihur and to Ed & Jan Jang and Bryce & Romy Chapman for allowing Norm to land his rescue helicopter in their back yards.

Venerable Vets Dr. Derrick Milton; Dr. Ken Langelier, Dr. Ian Lawrie and all the staff of Island Veterinary Hospital; Drs. Marnie Ford & Charlotte Keller of West Coast Veterinary Eye Specialists; Dr. Martin Haulena of the Vancouver Aquarium; Drs. Ilija Lukic; Drs. Malcom & Harold Bond of Saltspring Veterinary Services; Dr. Dave MacDonald & Dr. Sasha Edgell of Gulf Islands Veterinary Clinic and Dr. Stephen Raverty of Animal Health Center in Abbotsford.

We're Wild About Our Interns To cope with the onslaught of more than 500 birds and small mammals and 100 plus seal pups, each summer our sparse crew is augmented by brave young souls who travel to our Centre from all over the world. ... our interns. They spend two or three long months away from home, living communally, working 14-hour days volunteering full-time to care for the helpless and to learn.

The 2008 fellowship and intern crew were so special that if we could rebuild this team as is, we would do it in a heartbeat. Here's to you: fellows **Franziska Keune**, from Germany and **Heather Macintosh**, from Scotland, and interns **Kristina Love** of Westfield, Massachusetts; **Stephanie Royston**, of Vancouver, BC; **Timothy Gaffrey** of Porterville, California; **Diana Hernandez** of Los Angeles, California; **Kathryn Yochis** of Oostburg, Wisconsin; **Kailee Price** of Surrey, BC; **Crystal Afanasiff** of Edmonton, Alberta; **Bianca de Luca Altieri** of Sao Paulo, Brazil; **Natanya Epstein** of Portland, Oregon; **Lauren Wolchok** of Beverly Hills, California; **Alicia Beets**, of Chantilly, Virginia; **Chiara Albero** (below) of Milan, Italy; and **Marco & Judith Perrig** of Switzerland.





California Dreamin'

Imagine the last thing you expect to encounter when you pull into your local gas station to fill your tank. How about a 150-pound California Sea Lion? That's exactly what residents of Port Alberni found last January. A female sea lion had become lost and disoriented and wandered far from her natural waters off the coast of California. Entering the Alberni Inlet from the West Coast she hauled out, crossed the highway and planted herself by the pumps.

The Port Alberni SPCA jumped in to assist with the capture and the first leg of her journey. Next she was transferred to Nanaimo transporters, the Hendersons, who raced to meet Island Wildlife staff at the Crofton ferry terminal. There she was transferred to our rescue truck, which fortunately had a camper shell over the truck bed. We say fortunately, because the sea lion made good her escape from the rather undersized dog kennel and was now loose in the back of our truck. Once back at the Centre, one of our many challenges was how to get a distressed and rather toothy, 150-pound sea lion out of the back of the truck.

As female California Sea Lions seldom leave their home waters, she was a rare treat for us. Dubbed "Firefox", it quickly became apparent she was in rough shape.

Suffering from dehydration, starvation and a serious respiratory infection,

Firefox also displayed some peculiar neurological symptoms including a head twitch and occasional seizures. Domoic Acid poisoning, an often fatal condition ravaging female California Sea Lions, was the obvious diagnosis. Caused by toxic algae blooms off the California coastline, DAP would account for the disorientation that brought her to our waters, as well as the seizures and general poor physical condition.

After 2 months of careful supportive care and about 40 pounds of herring per day, Firefox had made a recovery strong enough to be given a second chance back in the ocean. Firefox was released close to a male Sea Lion haul-out at the Crofton mill. She was a magnificent animal, and it was a never-to-be-forgotten experience for everyone involved.

For the Birds

During the summer much of our focus is on Harbour Seal pups, but we are far from just a seal centre. Below are a few of the wonderful avian species we have the privilege to care for each year.



Crow nestlings



Mallard ducklings



Great Blue Heron nestling



Pacific Loon

Raven



Hooded Merganser duckling



Steller's Jay nestling



Northern Saw-whet owlets



If you can pick it up, it's an orphan

Let us share a little Harbour Seal natural history: In our corner of the world, pupping season is normally July through September. Average birth weight for a pup is 22 to 24 pounds. The lactation period is about 4 weeks, during which time the growing pup gains about one pound each day on fat rich mother's milk. The pup is weaned just four weeks later at about 50 to 55 pounds. This means that a healthy pup will reach 30 pounds in about one week. On the other hand, an orphan can lose 2/3 of a pound per day as it slowly starves to death. These are the pups that come into our facility, weighing as little as 10 pounds.

Harbour Seal mothers do not leave their young pups unattended and prone to predation while they go off to feed. As for people innocently picking up a pup while its mother is away, "pup napping", and thus making an orphan of the seal; this is in complete contrast to our experience. We have cared for hundreds of Harbour Seal pups over the years and have not seen a fat healthy pup brought into any facility that we have been associated with. Not to mention the fact that a passer-by simply is incapable of catching and carrying a healthy 30 or 35 pound seal pup!



We believe that much misunderstanding about BC seals has come as a result of information published by California marine mammal organizations. It is important to understand that animals adopt different behaviours in different geographic locations. With California's heavily populated coastlines, seals have

grown accustomed to close interactions with humans (as seen in this photo of a typical California Haul-out). It is not difficult to imagine how a person might pick up a tiny pup that is not an orphan.

In contrast to this, BC seals are accustomed to more remote locations and less direct contact with humans. Hauling out on rocky outcroppings and offshore islands, our local seals flee into the water at the approach of anyone, whether on foot, boating or in a kayak. When a pup is in trouble in BC, it is a pup that is found alone or left behind when other seals take to the water. It is not waiting for its mother. It is dying from dehydration and starvation. To the right and below are pictures of three typical orphaned BC pups.

A lone seal pup found on a beach, dock, log boom and that can be easily approached without rapidly fleeing into the water is a pup that will die without human intervention.

Sadly, there is not enough rehabilitation space and/or money to save all of the pups in need. It has become easier for agencies to tell the public to leave orphaned pups on the beach (where they will supposedly be joined by their mothers) than to tell them that there is simply no space or adequate funding to save them all. The public is treated like a child whose cat has died and has been told that Fluffy has gone to live on a farm, in order to spare them the harsh reality.

Opponents of seal rescue say, "Stop interfering. Let nature takes its course." But we have to ask ourselves 'What is natural today?' Is it natural for a wild animal to be born malnourished due to overfishing by humans? Is it natural for a wild animal to die orphaned because its mother has been shot by fish farmers or has drowned in a fishing net?



This fragile little creature is Geneva, a premature Harbour seal pup. She was born about two months early. She is wet to the bone, hypothermic (dangerously cold), has spent the last four days frantically swimming in the frigid ocean and crying for mom. Since her birth she has had nothing to eat or drink. And as this picture clearly shows, with her last ounce of strength, she has just dragged herself from the water onto a rocky outcropping where she is now dying.

Fortunately, the tiny wet bundle was one of the numerous pups rescued by GROWLS, the Gabriola Island rescue group. Once safely at IWNCC, it was discovered that Geneva was born with cataracts; as if her ordeal was not terrifying enough, she survived it blind.

At Island Wildlife, we don't base our care on what is easy and what is too hard. If an animal has a realistic chance to survive in the wild, we give them that chance. Geneva will undergo cataract surgery this fall, in an effort to restore enough vision that she may be considered for release. Keep your fingers crossed. (photo by Margi Gilmour)

Why did the turtle cross the road?

The turtle we speak of is a Western Painted Turtle . And as nearly as we can figure the turtle crossed the road to lay her eggs. Now, lying helpless and broken on the side of the road, a compassionate islander picked up the turtle and drove it to the Wildlife centre. At the centre, routine supportive care was administered. Fluids were injected into the turtle's dehydrated tissues, a course of turtle friendly antibiotics were administered and wounds were cleaned and disinfected. This is the sort of care that is afforded all patients here, whether the commonest of species or a federally listed endangered species as this Painted Turtle turned out to be. The Western Painted Turtle, an endangered species, is the only native pond turtle surviving in BC. And as for its survival on Salt Spring...well perhaps we helped just a little.



While participating in one of Island Wildlife's internships, Brazilian Veterinarian Bianca DeLuca Altieri takes a close look at the shell repair she performed on this injured endangered species. (photo by Derrick Lundy)

Our patient had a fractured piece of shell about the size of a silver dollar. The piece was still in place, connected by just a few bits of tissue and shell fragments. Stabilizing and securing this piece in place to give it time to regrow and permanently reattach would allow this turtle another chance.

Several thin strips of metal were snipped from a Pepsi can and epoxyed in place to act as a bridge or splint for the shell fragment. Now it was up to our animal care team to create an environment which would keep the turtle alive, happy enough to keep eating; tiny fish and herring bits, and keep his injuries dry.

Two months later, the shell had completely fused, the turtle had gained 40 grams and the weather was turning cooler. The turtle was allowed to swim off into a local habitat determined to have the most favourable conditions for this species.



With the use of herding boards, our international rescue team maneuvers an injured California Sea Lion into a transport kennel, on a Parksville beach. The mortally wounded sea lion had suffered a gunshot wound directly into its lower spine. Sadly, he did not survive. Pictured above are Marco Perrig (Switzerland), Chiara Albero (Italy), Marielle Bonnet (France).

Goodbye Dubai



Looking out of the window of her Nanaimo beachfront home, one July morning, a woman was shocked by the sight of a dead seal pup near the high tide line. Each time she went near the beach or looked out at the view, there was that stark reminder of what that tiny creature must have gone through. By the third day she could stand it no more and implored her husband to please go bury the tiny carcass.

Shovel in hand he went down to the beach. A substantial grave was easily dug in the soft sand. Tentatively grabbing the pup by its flipper he began to drag it to its final resting place. But what had he just seen? The pup twitched! Or at least he thought it did.

3 hours later that pup was in our intensive care facility. It was easy to see how this 13 pound seal was mistaken for dead. He was named Dubai, and to shorten a very lengthy story, 3 1/2 months later, a 65 pound, healthy Dubai was returned to the ocean.

Together, we can do important work.

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 Enclosed is my cheque payable to: **Island Wildlife**

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Struck down on the pavement at 1 week old while trying to follow her mother, this unlucky fawn was left to die by an islander too busy to stop. Surgery, casting and weeks of delicate handling paid off. This fawn survived to be released back to the wild in the fall. The rear leg injury is a typical indication that the fawn almost made it safely across the street. With wildlife, survival is a matter of inches, a matter of seconds and a matter of dollars. Your dollars.

Unlike a veterinary clinic, Island Wildlife is not intended to be a money making enterprise. We are a registered charity and there is no charge for any of our services. But it takes money.

Support from animal welfare foundations is dwindling. Funding through private donations along with donated goods and services are areas that have become absolutely critical to our survival.

You too can take part in this important work.

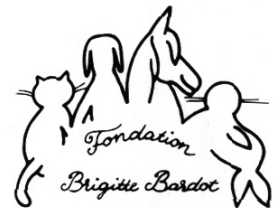
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Thank you to the following foundations for their critical and continuing support:

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Wish List



Well it's not exactly a list; more like a wish. We need a couple of used **Vehicles**. Our rescue and transport vehicles are in constant use and log 1,000's of life saving miles. We would enormously appreciate a reliable, used car or mini-van to keep us on the road. We can offer a tax receipt for the fair market value of the donation.