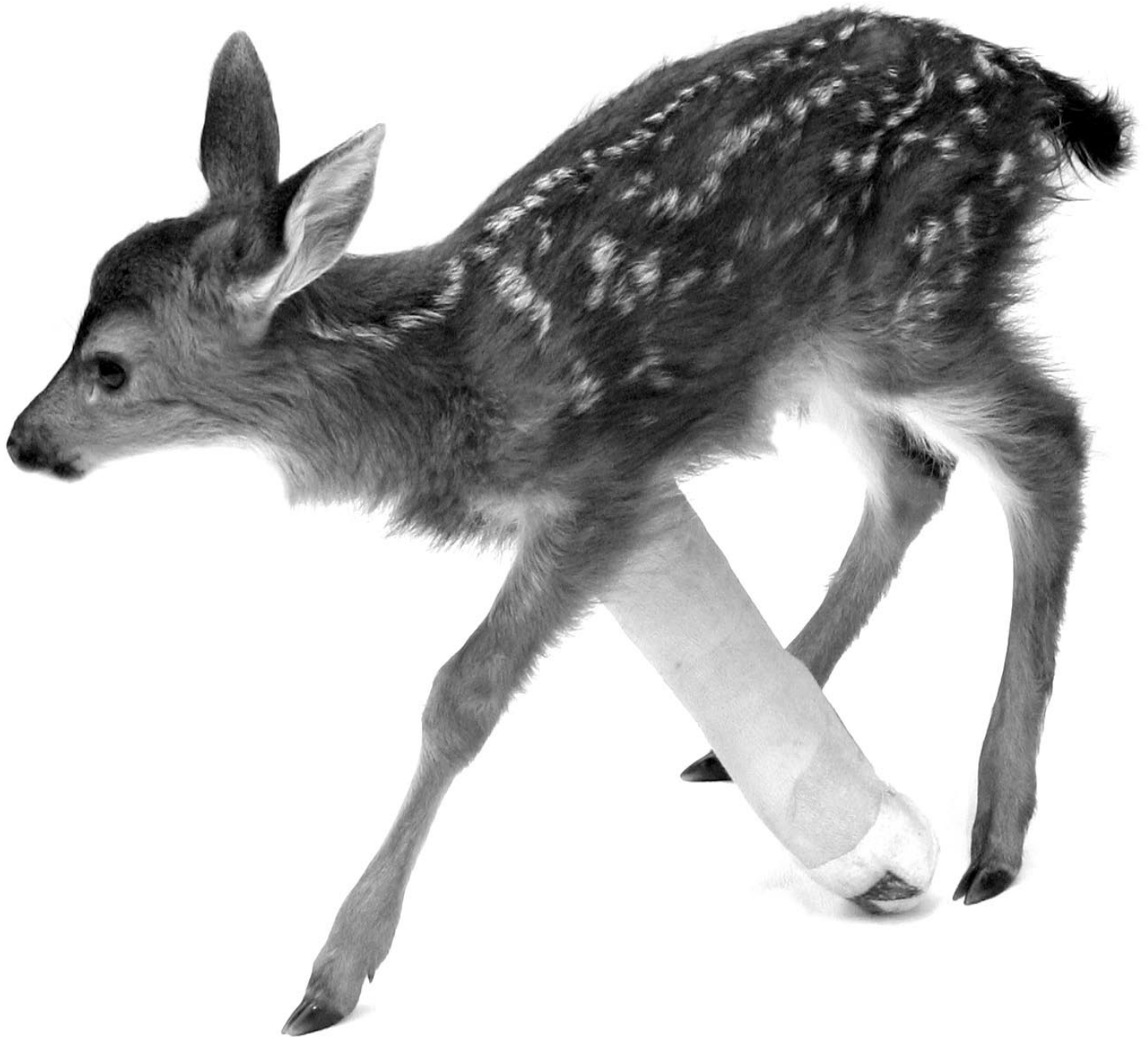


# island wildlife

N A T U R A L   C A R E   C E N T R E



*"Caring for BC's Wild Animals since 1996"*

*Summer 2010*

***If you love the Islands...you've got to love our wild life.*** *Thousands of people live here and thousands more flock here just to be a part of island life for a few days. One of the many attractions is the opportunity to get up close and personal with our wild creatures. And to love our wildlife is to share a sense of responsibility for their well-being. It is exactly that sense of responsibility that drives Island Wildlife Natural Care Centre.*

*We see healthy animals all around us, but every year there are hundreds that become the tragic victims of being a wild thing in a modern world. Island Wildlife offers them rescue and a place to be cared for professionally until they are healthy enough to be returned to a safe, natural habitat. For those of you who may not be familiar with Salt Spring's Island Wildlife, we are a not-for-profit organization that is unique in Canada. Now in our 14<sup>th</sup> year, we are one of only two marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation facilities in the country and the only one that treats all species...from songbirds to birds-of-prey; land mammals to marine mammals.*

*But running a wildlife hospital is no simple task. It takes money and our patients have no "owner" to foot the bill. For many years, environmental organizations such as ours were eligible for funding assistance through BC gaming profits. However, in 2008, after positioning itself with a strong environmental platform, the BC government shocked the province by declaring the environment was its lowest priority and eliminated all funding assistance for environmental charities, including wildlife care and protection. For us, that equalled a loss of \$65,000 or one-third of our annual budget. Grantmakers such as foundations and corporations have been hit hard by the economy and are unable to take up the slack. In fact, most have been forced to scale back all of their charitable giving. We now continue to look more and more to private donations to help us fund our work. As of the end of June 2010, we are half-way towards our goal of raising a total of \$100,000 from private donations. We're hopeful that both the residents of and visitors to our islands will continue to show how much these animals mean to them and help us give them the care they so deserve.*

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## *Sending Out an SOS (save our seals)*

Orphaned Harbour Seal pups are an all too frequent occurrence along the BC coastline. Often a seal pup is abandoned due to a premature birth or becomes lost in severe weather or heavy boat traffic. Also, first time mothers may be less likely to care for their offspring than an experienced seal mom. Whatever the cause, these fragile pups will not survive without intervention and the care afforded them at Island Wildlife.

We will go to almost any length to rescue and rehabilitate these unfortunate pups. It is not uncommon for an orphaned newborn to suffer from starvation and dehydration for up to two weeks before dying. During those agonizing weeks they struggle to stay afloat in the frigid ocean, without the ability to keep their bodies warm, calling and searching in vain for their mothers. They may be attacked by dogs on the beach, tossed onto the rocks by the surf, pushed back into the water by misinformed humans and even posed with for tourists' vacation pictures, only to be left once again back on the beach.

Popular misinformation will have you believe that a mother seal will leave her vulnerable newborn for 24 to 48 hours while she goes in search of food. Pictured to the left, (photo by Mony Vasseur), is *Snoopy*, a one day old, premature pup suckling on the hull of a sail boat. Using boats and docks as surrogate mothers is a sure sign that a pup is an orphan and is in need of immediate help. Fortunately this tiny orphan was one of our first seal admits for 2010.



Many of the pups that find their way to our facility have lost 40% of their body weight and are barely clinging to life. Transported to Island Wildlife by boat, plane, car or ferry, a newly admitted pup is weighed, thoroughly examined and assigned an isolation tub in our intensive care ward. Unconscious, emaciated, hypoglycemic and infected, these pups will receive around the clock nurturing during this stage of their care. They will remain in isolation for a minimum of 10 days as it is critical that any virus, bacteria or parasites carried by the new arrival not contaminate any other animals. Depending on the pup's condition, fluids will be given orally through a stomach tube or through a needle, subcutaneously or intravenously.

After two to three weeks of being fed formula via a tube down the seal's throat and directly into the stomach, it is time to start to introduce the mainstay of a seal's diet; fish. At first it is just one small herring. Gradually the pup's digestion grows accustomed to the change in diet and eventually whole fish will replace all of the formula tube feedings.

Once a pup has started eating fish, shows stable health and a normal blood lab report, the seal graduates to one of the centre's sixteen-foot pools. Occasionally it only takes a pup a few days to move from hand feeding fish to free feeding. We watch in awe as our orphan patients transform themselves into robust marine mammals insulated by a thick layer of newly acquired blubber.

As the end of Summer approaches, we begin to consider releasing our patients back into the ocean. Before a pup qualifies for release, its health and behavior are carefully scrutinized. Release day is both looked forward to and dreaded at the same time. We have worked night and day to prepare these pups to be returned healthy and wild back to the ocean. However, we can't help but worry about their future and their survival. After being loaded into crates, they are driven to the release site. The time has finally come. The fate of these pups is no longer within our control. The doors are opened and we watch in silence as Popeye, Bullwinkle, Mr. Magoo and the others make their way through the gentle surf...our thoughts are always with them.



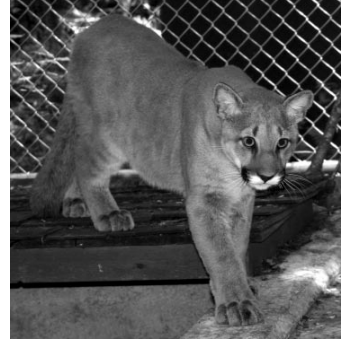
# Rehabilitation Success Stories



Bald Eagle



Cougar



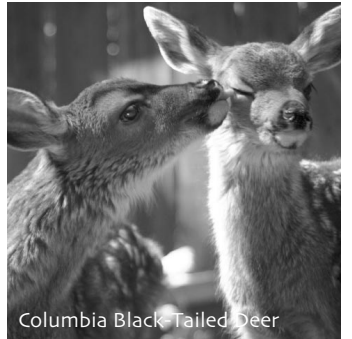
Barred Owl



Virginia Rail



Beaver



Columbia Black-Tailed Deer



Rufous Hummingbird



Northern Fur Seal



River Otter



Merlin Falcon

# Q&A with THE GREAT BLUE HERON



**Q- We would first like to congratulate you on winning a Provincial Blue ribbon. You must be very proud.**

GBH- It's not a "Blue Ribbon", it's the "Blue List" of Species at Risk (SARA). Great Blue Herons in this geographical location have been designated a species that it is considered to be both vulnerable and at risk. Also, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has given my coastal heron subspecies the status of "special concern".

**Q- Well, that's very different. What seems to be the problem?**

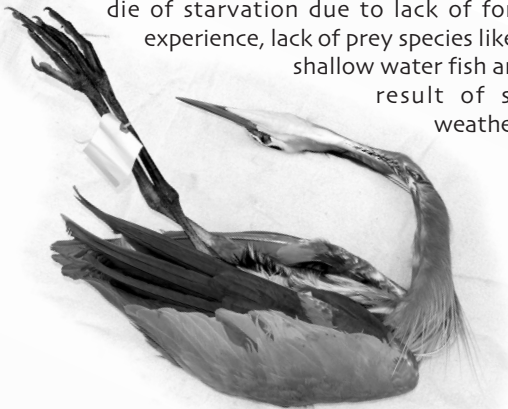
GBH- Quite honestly, you're the problem. The activities of humans can be very detrimental to us herons. Repeated human intrusion into our nesting areas often results in nest failure, with abandonment of eggs or chicks. Draining and filling wetland areas destroys our hunting grounds, reducing our supply of food. The number of young birds which can survive to breeding age depends in part upon the amount of food available in our nesting areas.

**Q-So that's it, humans are to blame?**

GBH- Not entirely. There are many direct threats to our populations in British Columbia including; mortality from predators, food supply limitations, environmental contamination, and the weather. Our eggs are eaten by raccoons and crows; Great Horned Owls can feed on our young, and eagles...don't get me started on eagles.

**Q- Well you seem to have done alright for yourself. You have a new partner every year, you have a beautiful nest with a view. How did you manage?**

GBH- Blind luck. The odds are stacked against my being here today. Did you know that about 75% of young herons don't survive to see their 1<sup>st</sup> birthday? When I was a nestling I saw my 3 nest mates eaten by eagles. Can you picture that scene? Most young herons that leave the nest successfully, die of starvation due to lack of foraging experience, lack of prey species like small shallow water fish and as a result of severe weather.



Of the 25% that survive year one, half of them never reach breeding age. In my nest, I was the 1<sup>st</sup> to hatch and as a result I was the strongest and I got the most food. That was my head-start.

**Q-Are you aware that Island Wildlife recently rescued the only surviving nestling from your small Price Road rookery?**

GBH- Sure, I hear things. The word on the beach is that quite a few of my clan owe their lives to the wildlife centre. Frequently, one of our 1<sup>st</sup> year offspring is found starving and is taken to or rescued by the wildlife centre. Sometimes when we are forced to abandon a nest site the young are left behind. Hunger will often force them to tumble out of the nest and the lucky ones are found on the ground before they become a meal for a predator. This little guy above was found in a driveway across from our nest site. The dedicated staff at the centre are having a positive impact on our local population.

**Q- Are you able to speculate on how long you might live?**

GBH- Not wanting to toot my own horn, but I've grown into quite a substantial bird. I'm street smart, I have a bad attitude and this beak isn't just for skewering fish. There just aren't many natural predators willing to risk tangling with me. So I would say barring anything unforeseen, I should reach 10 to 15 years old, easy.

**Note:** We are sad to write that the Great Blue Heron is not available for follow-up questions as he was fatally shot this Spring. He was found paralyzed at the foot of a tree at his Price Road nest site. X-rays revealed that a pellet from an air rifle had fractured his spine. Pictured to the left is the once great bird, frozen and tagged for evidence. The fine for shooting a Blue Listed species can run as high as \$100,000 for a first offense.

## The Rhythm of Life

Life may be like a box of chocolates to Forrest Gump, but at Island Wildlife life is more like a symphony. The natural biology of our wild creatures predicts the cadence of our work with such regularity that we can set our year's schedule to its rhythm. A crow flying overhead with a stick in its beak may not appear to have much meaning, but to us it is the first note of the prelude. If we had a symphonic theme, it could well be Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*.

**The first concerto, Spring,** opens with the cheerful song of the birds that welcome the season. Those same cheerful souls are, of course, hatching baby birds and ducklings and that's when our phones start to ring. Tiny feathered orphans abound and keep us hopping with feedings every 20 minutes from morning till dusk. Quickly adding their voices to this brisk tempo are baby mammals such as fawns, otters and raccoons. Now the bottle feedings become a part of our daily routine. The pace begins to accelerate as the numbers increase, and all the while we are gearing up for the first of our premature seal pups. These tiny fragile creatures bring about a drastic change to the beat of our work day as we now transition to five seal feedings every four hours throughout the day.

**During the Summer concerto,** the music grows more energetic leading up to a September crescendo, and our pace follows this beat. By July, seal pups are almost pouring in, often six a day, culminating in up to 100 pups at our facility at one time. Pups that have been treated in our intensive care ward are now being evaluated for promotion to one of our 8 pools. And gone are what now seem to be the blissful months of fattening up hungry baby birds. We are admitting older birds and mammals with more injuries and illnesses than those we care for in the spring. This is particularly intensive work as there are dozens of different species and each requires very specialized care.

**Autumn, which celebrates the harvest,** is also reflective of the time of year when we begin to reap the rewards of our work as well. Seal pups, birds and mammals are growing stronger, gaining weight rapidly and regaining their health. The days seem a bit more relaxed in comparison to the past few months. We are making preparations for many of our patients to make their ultimate dash to freedom...choosing appropriate locations well away from residential developments... netting fat and extremely evasive seal pups to check their weight and health...checking the flight abilities of our birds. We truly celebrate these months. But it's not all about releases as we continue to admit and treat older patients. Some will be seal pups that have been weaned from their mothers, but have not fared



well during the summer months. They come to us in extremely critical condition. Some will be birds and mammals that have been attacked by predators, hit by a car or are suffering from illness or injury. These animals will often be with us well into the winter months.

**Vivaldi's Winter suggests cold winds,** the stamping of feet and chattering of teeth; and the wildlife centre continues to follow this tempo. Throughout the cold months and the winter storms, we batten down the hatches, scrub out the detritus of past months, and continue to admit and care for patients that have not fared well in the bountiful months. This means weeks of walking with great trepidation on treacherous paths, breaking up ice on seal pools still inhabited by our winter seals, stringing up heat lamps, thawing



frozen pipes to keep our life's blood – water – flowing. In the symphony, this last concerto also suggests sheltering by the warmth of the fireside while the rain falls outside. Well...one cannot always follow an analogy 100%.

## The value of common species

*"To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering"* (Aldo Leopold)

Fitting words from one of America's foremost ecologists and environmentalists. Influential in the development of modern environmental ethics and the movement for wilderness conservation, and the founder of the science of wildlife management, Aldo Leopold had a profound impact on today's environmental movement. His philosophy closely matches that of Island Wildlife's second mandate: *"To foster within the community a sense of respect and responsibility for all wild species."*

His argument pro common species is simple. Without an intimate understanding of what contribution each species makes to an ecosystem, it would be foolish to allow the loss of any one of them and therefore, we must value all of them. Those that are abundant and widespread are so easily overlooked simply because of their commonality. And they may exert an important influence on the prevailing environmental conditions experienced by other species and therefore create an environment in which the less common may coexist.

*"Everything alive is connected to each other by fine invisible threads"* (Barbara Kingsolver).

This statement is well demonstrated by what is known as the Cascade Effect, a series of secondary extinctions triggered by the primary extinction of a key species. For an example, we can look to the sea otters. Starting before the 1600's and not phased out until 1911 when an international treaty was signed to prevent further exploitation; sea otters, a once prolific species, were hunted aggressively for their pelts. This caused a cascade effect through the kelp forest ecosystems along the Pacific Coast of the USA. One of the sea otters' primary food sources is the sea urchin. When hunters caused the sea otter populations to decline, an ecological release of sea urchin populations occurred. The sea urchins then overexploited their food source, kelp, creating barrens where no life exists. No longer having food to eat, the sea urchins populations became locally extinct as well. Also, since kelp forest ecosystems are homes to many other species, the loss of the kelp ultimately caused their extinction as well.

The fact is that today's common species will not necessarily remain so. Systematic declines are now frequent. Common species are the main victims of habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation. Once numerous species such as the Passenger Pigeon, the Hawaiian Crow and the Rocky Mountain Grasshopper have been driven to extinction in our lifetime. And, some of our most familiar common species are now in noticeable decline. Believe it or not, European populations of the Starling and House Sparrow have dropped dramatically since the late 1970's (Science Magazine, January 8).

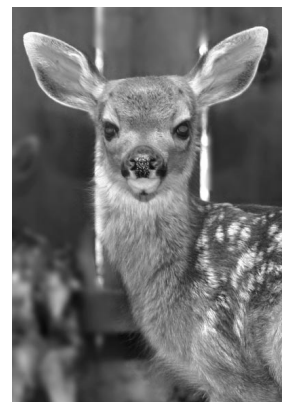
None of this is to say that rare species are unimportant. Rather, that we need to give weight both to retaining the different kinds of Leopold's "cogs and wheels" and to ensure that we have sufficient of each and that we give respect to the roles that each play.

**At Island Wildlife, all animals are treated with equal respect and compassion. We don't rescue common or rare species; we rescue animals in need.**



## Fawn family seeking good home

Do you have a special place in your hearts for our tiny island fawns, a large acreage (preferably mixed grasslands and woods, maybe even fenced) far away from busy traffic areas? If so, we are seeking good late summer foraging grounds for our orphaned fawns once they have been weaned from their bottles and have recovered from their injuries. Wildlife centre staff and volunteers spend hundreds of hours every year scouring the island looking for accessible natural forage that we can cut and drive back to the centre for our fawns in order to get their weight up in time for winter. With a safe natural environment, we could release these little ones earlier and give them more time to acclimatize before the cold months begin. And we could dedicate this saved time to providing even more care to the critically ill. If you can help or know someone that may be able to, please call the centre at 250-537-0777.



With 500 injured, orphaned and sick wild patients each year to rescue, transport and tend to, our small staff would be overwhelmed without the commitment and dedication of our volunteers and partners. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts to the seasonal animal care interns who live and work with us throughout the spring, summer and fall; our rescue and transport volunteers who rush to help bring our patients in from every nook and cranny of our islands; our regional veterinary clinics and local support organizations; the local residents who help us daily with animal care duties; and our generous funders and donors. We invite readers to watch for our winter newsletter when we will take great pleasure in acknowledging each and every one personally.

## Dangerous liaisons

Hand in hand with our role of providing medical care and treatment for our wild patients is our responsibility to the humans in our communities with respect to interacting with wildlife. It is a misnomer that we only work with the furred, feathered and flippered species; we also work a great deal with the two-legged variety. A lesser noticed aspect of our work is that of public safety. While the topic doesn't lend itself to cute photos and heart warming animal tales, it is an important one to consider.



Of our 500 patients each year, many are harmless baby songbirds and malleable fawns, easily enough picked up and transported by the average citizen. But there's a big difference between attempting to rescue a fledgling robin and a sea lion with a bullet in his spine. Each year we are faced with intervening in numerous situations that could pose serious danger to an untrained would-be rescuer or an innocent passer-by. Injured wild animals are unpredictable and their first line of defence is often to strike out at what they consider to be a terrifying threat ... humans. When we receive a call about an animal in need, we assess each situation as to whether or not we can recommend that the caller should take action or whether we need to have one of our staff members or rescue volunteers on the scene.



We have responded to several sea lion and elephant seal calls where the animal was in a public area and injured or sick. One was our infamous California Sea Lion, *Firefox*, a 200 pounder who had hauled out at a Port Alberni gas station and was chasing locals who had stopped for a fill up. A sea lion has teeth more powerful than an adult German Shepard and can inflict tremendous damage. Even a young harbour seal must be handled with care once they have teeth. The smallest bite can result in an infection termed "seal finger". We have admitted beavers with leptospirosis, a serious bacterial disease that is transmittable to humans. Bats sometimes carry rabies and one small puncture can transmit the disease. There have been several cases of bats brought into our centre which had tested positive for rabies virus. We respond to many reports of downed birds-of-prey and these must be handled with great caution. A Bald Eagle has talons that can crush with 1,000 pounds of pressure per square inch and an owl can suddenly lash out with its razor sharp beak or talons. A doe that has been hit by a car can pose a traffic threat. We arrive at the scene as quickly as possible to ensure people are not standing out in the roadway trying to direct traffic around the animal or that another vehicle does not become involved in the accident. All too frequently we respond to a buck tangled in net garden fencing. Trying to untangle a panicked adult buck can result in being gored by its antlers. A few years ago we rescued a starving cougar kitten that had staggered into a Vancouver Island resident's home. He didn't pose a threat at that very moment, but had the resident succumbed to their first instinct to home raise him, it would have been a different story. A starving Great Blue Heron found in your bushes sports a coiled neck with a 6" dagger like beak and switchblade reflexes. We have read reports of a heron being found with its beak impaled through a solid wood boat oar! At the wildlife centre these animals are handled with safety equipment like goggles or face shields and heavy towels.



We really don't mean to sound like alarmists but we urge you to use caution when approaching an injured wild animal. And phone us immediately at 250-537-0777. We operate a late night emergency pager so that we can always be reached.



Jeff Lederman....Founder Jackie Ballerone....Director Marielle Bonnet....Marine Mammal Specialist  
 Seasonal Rehabilitators 2010....Chiara Albero, Tyler Jordan & Pedro Baranda Kisae Peterson....Bookkeeper

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



Eden Conservation Trust



THE W. GARFIELD WESTON  
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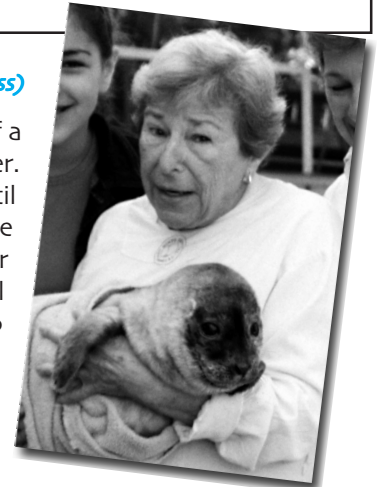


KERN

Partners In Value Growth



VICTORIA  
 FOUNDATION



**Expand your family this year** (and help save the life of a tiny seal pup in the process)

Ever considered adopting a newborn seal pup? He or she might not bear much of a family resemblance, but we guarantee you will lose your heart to this new family member. Each year Island Wildlife admits up to 100 starving, orphaned pups and cares for them until they are strong enough to make it on their own in the wild. A \$500 donation will net you the opportunity to adopt a pup and help save its life. Your adoption kit includes: A full-colour frameable certificate personalized with your family's name; an invitation to attend a seal release this fall at a scenic Salt Spring Island location; and a pre-release tour of our seal pup pools with the chance to watch your pup weighed and prepared for transport.

Simply complete the coupon below and mail it to us. We will contact you once we have received your adoption fee and information. For more information about our adoption program or our seal pup rehabilitation program, call Jackie or Marielle at 250-537-0777.

**Donation amount:** \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ \*E-mail (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

\* E-mails are only interesting animal or event updates, not solicitations. Information from our database is private and never shared.

We would love to adopt a seal pup, as mentioned above. Please tell us about the next available orphan.

Please send us a tax receipt.

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

Visa  MasterCard

Account # \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. date \_\_\_\_\_

**What does it take to save a wild life?**

It takes a very special place where our injured and orphaned wild creatures can be rescued and cared for until they are healthy enough to be returned to a safe natural habitat. A place like Island Wildlife Natural Care Centre.

We admit and treat patients from all the Gulf Islands and mid-Vancouver Island at our Salt Spring Island facility. But we can't do it alone. It takes a caring community to help us with financial support to pay for the food, medical supplies, equipment, temporary habitats and staff that these animals so desperately need. Our not-for-profit organization does not charge for its services and exists solely to help the animals that we, as individuals and communities, have harmed. With no government funding and cut backs from foundations who are facing financial difficulties themselves, we hope to raise \$100,000 from the residents of and visitors to our communities.

What does it take to save a wild life? Island Wildlife and you. Please help save the lives of our precious wildlife by making a tax deductible donation.

We are now able to accept automated monthly donations through CanadaHelps on-line at [www.sealrescue.org](http://www.sealrescue.org)

322 Langs Road, Salt Spring Island, BC V8K1N3 Phone: 250-537-0777  
 E-mail: [iwncc@aol.com](mailto:iwncc@aol.com) [www.sealrescue.org](http://www.sealrescue.org) Charitable #888706140RR001