International Bird Rescue
NEWSLETTER

A Quarterly Publication of the International Bird Rescue Research Center
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Volume 1 Number 1 18 January 1972

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THE IBRRC

On January 18, 1971, two oil tankers collided under the Golden Gate Bridge spilling a megagallon of oil. Through the generosity of the University of California, a bird rescue center was opened at their warehouse in Richmond on the following day. In April, the International Bird Rescue Research Center (IBRRC) was incorporated to perpetuate the experience gained at Richmond and search for answers to the problems which plagued bird rehabilitation efforts. The Center now stands ready to send information or people and supplies to help any community organize and conduct a bird rehabilitation operation.

RICHMOND REMINISCENCE

Date: 21 February 1971
Ward: A

A.M.

Creepos & goons unite. Birdies are a truckin'. Ahh yes.. Today our friendly prisoners(cops, I mean Patients) were bloated & water-logged. Yum, yum, ate well as usual. Our grebes just eat & eat all day long. They, of course, take shifts eating so we try to keep their food supply ample all day long. Of course when they leave their food for too long, the fishys all die. Oh poo, what a total BURN. Our new birds residing in their exclusive Pen P Apartments are eating rather pickily. Hmm, maybe they lost their appetite during the move over. Actually, maybe it's their new surroundings. Oh well

THEN... Miss Paula & I flew off to Berzerkeley to wash off our outer layer of assorted crap. And spent a short amount of time (wishing so much it could have been a long amount of time) flying around Tilden Park collecting water rushes & all sorts of plants that were hovering about the edges of good ol' Lake Anza. & also collected a box of sand. (It must have weighed 1000 lbs.) And ZAP...

P.M.

we returned just in time for Pen Cleaning. So we commenced to interior decorate the pen of Mr. Amazing with a swimming pool, sand & rushes & plants. Ugh, it was harder than we had imagined. That vinyl matting is really hard to work with. Anyway they didn't like it at all. They had to walk uphill to get there & they kept slipping down. So we are going to make it even & get more bushy stuff... Although I'm beginning to think they like the sawdust better. AWK!! Anyway -(You know something, I have a strange feeling that I've written this before.) Oh well

(Signed) Egg

4 Parts Oil & 1 Part Bird

Once upon a time these two oil tankers were out in the fog and...

We used straw to soak up a lot of that million gallons of oil spilled in San Francisco Bay last year. The local water birds used themselves for the same purpose.

At Richmond we cared for 1285 oil covered birds. Of these only 198, about 16%, were released in healthy condition. That low survival rate is the highest yet acheived in a large scale bird rehabilitation effort. (A bit more about percentages later.)

Since the early days of Richmond, we have learned much through experience and much through review of scientific literature. One thing is certain: no one, including us, has optimized rehabilitation for oil-soaked waterfowl. If you would like to know a little of the problems involved, read on. If not there is your TV which is carefully tailored to fit your tastes (or is it the other way around?).

Capturing and confining birds causes them to freak out. This often results in a state of shock leading to death. Administration of a proper dose of dexamethasone helps minimize this problem.

Now we have a bird that needs the oil cleaned off of its feathers and out of its gut. Milk of magnesia will help clean out the gut. The type of cleaner to use on the feathers depends on many factors which merit a separate article in a later newsletter.

Feathers are easily and irreparably damaged. Any manipulation other than softly stroking them in the direction of the 'grain' may result in a rehabilitation time of months instead of days. The cleaner will leach out the feather's natural oils which the single preen gland (uropygial gland) had produced. Without a sufficient ration of natural oil, a feather begins to get the frizzies, first at the microscopic level and eventually it becomes obvious from a cosmetic standpoint. Since it is the compact regular microstructure that renders a feather water-repellent, even the micro-frizzies will cause a feather to soak up water. It is also possible that the preen gland is malfunctioning at this time due to stress, cleaning agents, or other causes. The administration of gland stimulating drugs and a fat-rich diet may be able to keep the preen gland working full time while the bird is in captivity. Meanwhile, until the preen gland can catch up, we need to prevent the frizzies. Application of a $\frac{1}{4}$ percent solution of Pur-Cellin wax is a technique we are experimenting with. Treating feathers with a substitute for natural feather oils, however, will not necessarily help them shed water. The micro-structure of each feather needs to be skillfully kept in alignment by an expert, namely the bird. To accomplish this, the bird needs to spend much of the day preening his feathers. Circumstances must be provided to cue this essential activity. In general, a bird will preen if he is contented and his feathers are slightly wet. (I wish to emphasize the word, "slightly" since a wet bird is subject to chilling.) If the substitute for natural oil is not good enough, a beautifully floating bird may gradually get the frizzies and each day be less able to shed water. Some people have returned good-looking birds to the wild even though a progressive case of micro-frizzies may have doomed the birds to a chilly death. These people are able to release most of their birds in what appears to be exellent shape and boast of a very high survival rate. So much for percentage figures.

A captured bird desperately needs water and food but probably will not accept either. The problem is: how to make a wild waterfowl feel secure and contented enough to eat and drink what he needs. This leads to such diverse topics as bird psychology, white noise, anatomy, stimulation of appetite, and financial limitations.

Aspergillosis, bumblefoot, eye lesions, vitamin absorption, parasites, thiaminase poisoning, bed sores, oil toxicosis, chaffed feet, et cetera are topics for some other time. Meanwhile pray for clean water.

David Smith

DATA FROM THE RICHMOND BIRD CENTER

	Number Treated	Number Survived	Percent Survival
Total	1285	198	15.41
Western Grebe	618	48	7.77
Horned Grebe	21	1	4.76
Arctic Loon	3	1	33.33
Common Loon	4	0	-----
Red-Throated Loon	7	0	-----
Common Murre	92	5	5.43
Cormorant	6	0	-----
Common Scoter	19	2	10.53
Surf Scoter	119	44	36.97
White Wing Scoter	192	70	36.46
Bufflehead	1	0	-----
Canvasback	11	3	27.27
Common Goldeneye	4	0	-----
Red-Br. Merganser	4	2	50.00
Ruddy Duck	7	0	-----
Lesser Scaup	5	5	100.00
Greater Scaup	5	4	80.00
Mallard	1	1	100.00
Black Brant Goose	1	0	-----
American Coot	3	1	33.33
California Gull	5	2	40.00
Ring-Billed Gull	1	1	100.00
Western Gull	2	2	100.00
Glaucous Gull	1	0	-----
Herring Gull	1	0	-----
White Pelican	1	0	-----
Sandpiper	1	1	100.00
Willet	1	0	-----
Ruddy Turnstone	1	0	-----
Incompletely Identified			
"Loon"	22	0	-----
"Scoter"	86	0	-----
"Scaup"	4	1	25.00
"Duck"	8	0	-----
"Gull"	7	4	57.14
"Bird"	21	0	-----
Summary			
All Loons	36	1	2.78
All Ducks	466	132	28.33
All Gulls	17	9	52.94

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Please tell others about us.
Our membership rates are:

Junior	$1/year
Student	$2/year
Regular	$5/year
Family	$10/year
Supporting	$100
Sustaining	$250

VISITOR FROM CANADA

Paul Woodhouse is an environmentalist from Vancouver, British Columbia who recently visited the Bird Rescue Center. The purpose of his visit was to gather information needed to save birds threatened by pollution in his native Canada. "We are particularly anxious about American super tankers that will soon be carrying oil along our coasts and threading their way through the San Juan Islands to a refinery only ten miles south of the Canadian border. The area in Canada that is in the path of the currents that flow from the refinery at Cherry Point is abundantly blessed with wildlife living in a carefully preserved natural setting. Many migratory birds use this area as a feeding stop while passing between the U.S. and the north."

Mr. Woodhouse is an active member of the Canadian Scientific Pollution & Environmental Control Society (S.P.E.C.) based in Vancouver. He first became involved with oil-soaked birds last January when the Oregon Standard and the Arizona Standard collided under the Golden Gate. At the time he was in the Bay area to cheer on his favorite hockey team. When he learned of the spill, however, he commenced to rescue birds and help treat them at the 'Family Dog' on the Great Highway in San Francisco. Three months later, when Texaco spilled 180,000 gallons of diesel oil at Anacortes in northern Washington, Paul helped treat the affected wildlife. He recounted, "Due to the toxic properties of the diesel oil, almost no birds survived. Even the shellfish were wiped out."

Sharply critical of the present situation in Canada that finds 73% of their country owned by American interests, he continued, "U.S. industry is causing an incredible amount of damage to the natural environment around the world. Americans seem to take this rather lightly but we in Canada are not about to quietly accept further damage to the Canadian environment by American industry."

ANACORTES SPILL

On the evening of April 28, 1971 the IBRRC received word that a major oil spill had occured three days before at Anacortes, Washington. The Seattle Wild Bird Clinic under the direction of Mrs. Joni Butler was managing the care of the oil-soaked waterfowl. The IBRRC was contacted and asked for assistance in the care and rehabilitation of the involved birds.

The following morning it was decided that Pete Vigil and I would be dispatched to provide on the scene assistance. We arrived at the Seattle Wild Bird Clinic late that afternoon and after a brief discussion with Mrs. Butler were driven to the Johnson farm, 14 miles outside of Seattle, where the birds were being cared for.

Just about the time we got to the farm the last truck load of birds arrived, bringing the total live count to 23 out of nearly 100 birds treated there. Our initial reaction to this high mortality rate was that it was as a result of stress as the birds had been picked up at the spill, shipped 10 miles by small boat, cleaned at Anacortes, flown by PBY 100 miles to seattle, then trucked the 14 miles to the Johnson farm; not the prescribed care after our experience with stress at Richmond.

Although none of the birds died of stress after we arrived, all but four were dead before we left four days later. They died in a manner we had never before seen. Well cleaned, healthy looking birds, feeding well, preening, and generally looking excellent would walk across their pen and suddenly keel over dead. The initial autopsies showed kidney failure. Upon calling Dr. Harris, our veterinarian in Berkeley, we discovered this was perfectly reasonable given the toxicity of the # 2 diesel fuel which was spilled.

We learned a great deal at the Seattle spill. For one thing we found that we cannot expect the kind of large scale volunteer response which was apparent during the San Francisco Spill. The quantity of pollutant spilled was only one fifth of that spilled in S.F. Bay yet only 12 people were involved in bird rehabilitation on the 4th day and we were forced to start organizing on a basic level in terms of communications and supplies. It was apparent that no attempt had been made to mobilize the general population for fear that those controlling the situation would be superceded by more competent people.

The final score reads as follows: 400 birds were retrieved from the oil. 100 of them were already dead at the time they were found. Of the 300 found alive, only 100 reached the Seattle Wild Bird Clinic still living. After one week, 4 remained. Those 4 died shortly thereafter. It is our contention that probably 10 times as many birds were involved in this spill than were actually picked up because of the rapidity with which the slick spread. If the organizers of the Seattle Wild Bird Clinic had utilized many of the resources open to them we feel a more thorough search and pick-up could have been carried out.

Recently we received the final autopsy reports from the Seattle Spill. They were never picked up by the Seattle Wild Bird Clinic and came to us through the courtesy of Mr. Paul Woodhouse of Vancouver, B.C. They showed the birds died of a combination of the toxicity of the oil and the toxicity of the detergent (Zif) the birds were cleaned in.

It is our feeling, based on these reports, that until a new non-toxic cleaner is produced which is effective on oils lighter than mineral oil, it may be best in some cases that birds be euthanized humanely rather than be subjected to the stress of cleaning only to die later from toxicity of either the oil or the cleaner or both.

Josh Lichterman
Director of Response