



SWALLOW TALES

Autumn/Winter Newsletter 2011

Dedicated to the conservation of native songbirds through rehabilitation, release and public education.

Greetings from the Director

Hello and happy holidays! We have many wonderful things to celebrate and be thankful for this year at The Songbird Hospital. I'd like to take this opportunity to share some of our most rewarding achievements with you.

2011 has been our busiest season ever, receiving over 650 patients of 60 different songbird species at our hospital. Injured, orphaned and ill native songbirds are brought to us by caring people like you from all over Sonoma County and beyond. I am extremely proud that 74% of the birds we provided care to were successfully rehabilitated and released back to the wild for a second chance to fly free. Our high release rate is a direct reflection of our commitment to specialize in native songbirds with an emphasis on migratory insectivores, such as swallows and flycatchers. By specializing, we are able to focus our expertise and all available resources to ensure the highest level of care possible.

This spring we launched our educational outreach program "Saving Songbirds One at a Time". This heart-warming and informative presentation provides an overview of our work with the birds; discusses some of the challenges songbirds are facing in the world today and offers simple ideas that we can all use to help songbirds in our own backyards and surrounding environment. I had the pleasure of speaking to several community groups this year, including Madrone Audubon Society and Russian River Rotary. Public education is an essential component of our mission and we're committed to inspiring generations of individuals through our outreach efforts. I'm excited to report that we already have multiple speaking engagements confirmed for early 2012.

We responded to over 3000 calls from the public this year. 365 days a year, seven days a week from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm we provide a critical service as first response to someone with a songbird in distress. We also answer general questions the public has about songbirds and offer helpful advice about supporting songbirds and creating a peaceful coexistence with our feathered wild neighbors.

The Songbird Hospital is supported 100% by volunteers, we do not have any paid staff. I am very fortunate to have the help of compassionate and dedicated volunteers who love songbirds as much as I do. This incredible team contributed over 5000 hours this year helping care for the birds in the hospital. They also traveled approximately 10,000 miles around the Bay Area assisting with the rescue, transport and release of birds back to the wild.

Healing injured and orphaned songbirds and giving them a second chance is personally rewarding, but it is also extremely important work. While they grace our daily lives with beauty and joy, songbirds are vital members of our native ecosystems and without them things would become terribly out of balance in the natural world. We're devoted to saving the lives of songbirds and returning them to the wild so that they may continue their important work. A beautiful ripple effect occurs by helping a songbird to fly free again – we also help our environment and we help our community.

Caring people like you make our work possible. Your support means the world to us and enables us to continue our efforts saving the lives of songbirds. Please take a moment to review the donation form on the back page of our newsletter. Your gift of financial support goes directly to the care of the birds and supports our mission. On behalf of our native songbirds, thank you for your kindness and generosity.

Sincerely,

Veronica Bowers, Director and Founder



Photo Bobbi Lance, Cygnus Studios

This Pacific-slope Flycatcher was caught by a cat. He was a tiny fledgling at the time, weighing just 8 grams. He had several puncture wounds and a fractured leg, but was successfully rehabilitated and released back to his oak woodland habitat in Sebastopol.

On Being a Songbird Hospital Volunteer

By Christine Engel, Songbird Hospital Volunteer since 2007



Photo Bobbi Lance, Cygnus Studios

This juvenile Western Bluebird was found in the middle of a field and unable to fly. He had a broken wing, but he healed beautifully and was reunited with his wild family.



Photo Bobbi Lance, Cygnus Studios

These Barn Swallow nestlings were orphaned when their nest fell from a building. The finder attempted to renest them in hanging a basket, but the parents abandoned the babies. They were raised at SBH and released back to the wild.

I can't imagine a world without birds, especially songbirds. These perching passerines bring us beauty and joy with their dawn chorus of songs and calls and their visits to our gardens and feeders. But they are a critical part of the web of life, keeping insects in check, carrying and dispersing seeds, and pollinating plants. Many families in this taxonomic order are decreasing in number, mostly due to human activities.

When thinking about what I could do to help, I decided that any volunteer efforts should include: a learning experience; being in a pleasant, organized environment; achieving attainable goals; and feeding my better nature. This led me to the Songbird Hospital in Sebastopol. My learning started immediately with discovering that baby birds, even seed eaters, are fed insects. They eat so frequently that I became aware of how important it is for the parents to have ample and nutritious food supplies in the wild. They are busy feeding as well as ridding the nest of waste and keeping their babies clean so feathers can develop into perfect structures that provide warmth, waterproofing, strong flight, and attracting mates.

The Songbird Hospital aims to replicate these conditions when baby birds have lost their parents or injured birds can't meet their own needs. Our Director is passionate, energetic, and devoted to providing quality care. She attends conferences, researches, and teaches other rehabilitators the newest and best information on diet, husbandry, and aviary set-up and upkeep. Our tasks are organized to be fast, efficient and yet keep everything clean. If necessary, we will feed baby birds every 15 to 20 minutes and more importantly our Director does more than any volunteer, opening the Hospital at dawn and closing as late as 11:00 pm during baby bird season.

As I watch the development of many almost blind, naked babies start as big gaping mouths and become beautiful, releasable birds, I know we have given them a chance to mate and reproduce. Why does this appeal to the best in me? It connects me to the world putting aside my personal needs including family, friends, society, and even the overall obsession with my own species. We are only one among so many life forms but constantly ignore, unintentionally hurt, or destroy what is a glorious, dancing quilt of wonder and beauty.

Birds and the Songbird Hospital transform me into an integral part of this quilt.

Heartfelt thanks to those who support The Songbird Hospital in so many ways - we couldn't do it without you!

Veterinary services and advice: Dr. Dan Famini of Heritage Veterinary Hospital (our Songbird Hospital Veterinarian of Record), Dr. Rob Jereb of Northpark Veterinary Clinic, Dr. Joel Blumberg of Santa Rosa Veterinary Hospital, Dr. Rebecca Duerr of International Bird Rescue, and Dr. Guthrum Purdin of Sacramento Wildlife Care

Volunteers and Honorary Volunteers: Mary Pierce, Brian Pierce, Ronald Pierce, Carol Zeidman, Estrella Phegan, Beth Haylock, Chris Engel, Chris Schumacher, Valerie Hanelt, Hans Hickenlooper, Wendy St. John, Maggie Rufo, Lynda Larsen, Francoise Samuelson, Frances Crosse, Andrea Floyd, Gordon Beebe, Lance Groody

Merchants and Professional Services: photographer Bobbi Lance of Cygnus Studios, artist Molly Eckler, Sprint Copy Center, Friedman Brothers, The Wild Bird Center and Wild Birds Unlimited.

Our friends from other wildlife centers around the Bay Area: Wildcare of Marin, Sonoma County Wildlife Rescue, Bird Rescue Center of Santa Rosa, International Bird Rescue, Sacramento Wildlife Care, Peninsula Humane Society, Lindsay Wildlife, Woodlands Wildlife, Napa Wildlife Rescue Center, Gold Country Wildlife and Wildlife Rehabilitation and Release.

The Songbird Hospital in the News

We had the good fortune of being featured on **KGO-TV ABC 7 news** over the summer and were recognized for our work with the songbirds. SBH Volunteer Beth Haylock (former employee of KGO-TV ABC 7) made this wonderful connection possible. Thanks, Beth! If you missed it, here's a link to the video: <http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/video?id=8304567&pid=8304575>

We were also featured in the local **Press Democrat** Towns section. Many thanks to PD photographer John Burgess for the fabulous photos included in the article. Here's a link to the news article: <http://sebastopol.towns.pressdemocrat.com/2011/08/news/saving-songbirds/>

Backyard Bird Bio – The Bushtit

By Wendy St. John, Songbird Hospital Volunteer since 2008

The Bushtit, *Psaltriparus minimus* - an adorable bird which can easily be seen in Sonoma County - is one of the smallest songbirds in western North America. Only 11 cm long, and weighing just over 5 grams, in our area these tiny birds are grey, with tinge of brown on the crown of their heads. The birds have relatively long tails, and small dark bills for gleaning insects from tree bark.

Although they are tiny, they are not difficult to spot if you know what to watch for. They appear in small groups, constantly communicating with one another with high-pitched *tzee* calls while they hang upside down in trees, gleaning insects and spiders. When one flock moves on to the next tree, another group comes in behind them, and an entire large flock of 50 or more birds will move through an area in this manner, a steady stream of lively, chattering birds. Bushtits can also be found in mixed flocks, along with kinglets, wrens, warblers and chickadees. While their diet is primarily insects and spiders, they occasionally eat fruit and seeds.

During nesting season, they build an impressive hanging, gourd-shaped nest out of various materials - including moss and lichen, leaves, grass, hair, feathers and spider web. The nest, which can be up to a foot long, has an entrance hole high up on the side, with a passageway to the nest chamber at the bottom. Both parents share in brooding the eggs. Care for the young is done by parents with the help of other birds from the flock until the young are ready to leave the nest at two weeks of age.

After fledging, the young and parents stay in family groups, which join with other groups to form large flocks. Bushtits can be found in woodlands, scrub and chaparral habitats, as well as in suburban neighborhoods and parks.



Photo by Veronica Bowers

Bushtits are one of the tiniest patients we care for at The Songbird Hospital. These little guys were from two separate nests. One nest was destroyed by a cat, the other destroyed by a Scrub Jay. They were admitted to SBH as nestlings, about 8 days old and were the only surviving members of their families. They were raised with other orphaned Bushtits and eventually made their healthy return to the wild.

Reduce Bird Collisions

Window collisions are the second leading cause songbirds are admitted to The Songbird Hospital. According to the American Bird Conservancy, an estimated 300 million to 1 billion birds die each year from collisions with glass on buildings. Confused by the reflection of the surrounding environment, birds often mistake windows for safe and clear passage. Even if a bird flies away after striking a window, it may die elsewhere as a result of the collision. If you have a window that birds hit, even occasionally, here are some ideas from American Bird Conservancy that may help resolve the problem.

The easiest solution is to apply visible markings to the outside of windows in patterns that the birds can see. Studies show that most birds will avoid windows with vertical stripes spaced four inches apart, or horizontal stripes spaced two inches apart. More complicated or irregular patterns will also work as long as they follow these general spacing guidelines. Stripes can be created using tape or tempera paint.

Stretch lightweight netting, screen, or other material over the window. The netting or other material must be several inches in front of the window, so birds don't hit the glass after hitting the net.

Window decals are a well-known technique. However, to be effective, they must be spaced more closely than recommended by manufacturers and so may block more of the glass surface than other options.

Apply CollidEscape, a window film designed for external use on glass windows. It's see-through from the inside, opaque from the outside. Available at collidescape.org

About The Songbird Hospital

Located in Sebastopol, The Songbird Hospital is dedicated to the rehabilitation and healthy release of wild native songbirds. We also provide public outreach and education about these fascinating birds and their valuable role in our native ecosystem. The Songbird Hospital is supported entirely by volunteers and donations.

We are an official program of Sonoma County Wildlife Rescue, located in Petaluma. We operate under the non-profit status of Sonoma County Wildlife Rescue; as well as the California Department of Fish and Game and US Fish and Wildlife Service permits issued to SCWR.

www.songbirdhospital.org

Yes! I want to support our native songbirds by making a generous year-end gift to The Songbird Hospital.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Please make checks payable to: Songbird Hospital of SCWR

Mail this form with your contribution to: The Songbird Hospital
8050 Elphick Road
Sebastopol, CA 95472



*The Songbird Hospital is supported by people like you.
Your tax-deductible donation goes directly to the care, feeding and housing of orphaned, ill and injured native songbirds. Thank you for your kindness.*



8050 Elphick Road
Sebastopol, 95472

www.songbirdhospital.org
(707) 484-6502

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