

# Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton

Compassionate Care of Injured and Orphaned Wildlife

The Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton is a non-profit, charitable organization that provides compassionate care for injured and orphaned wildlife. They also promote understanding and respect for wildlife through education programs. The Society manages a treatment centre which includes an admitting and assessment area, indoor intensive care and exercise rooms, and outdoor flight pens. Since 1989, they have helped approximately 10,000 birds and mammals receive proper medical treatment with the ultimate goal of returning these animals back to their natural habitat.

Enviro Kids Guide recently spoke with Cheryl Feldstein, the Executive Director of the Society. She tells us that "we help out all different species of birds and small mammals. We always ask people to call us first, though, before intervening or bringing any wildlife down. This allows us to assess the situation, and tell them the safest way to handle the creatures. It also gives us advance warning so that we can get prepared for the animals. The three species we can't work with are pigeons, skunks and bats because of concerns they will spread diseases to other species. 85% of our patients are birds, and 15% are mammals. The birds include perching birds, waterfowl and raptors. The small mammals include foxes, squirrels, hares, woodchucks, muskrats and porcupines. We also work with deer fawns and coyote pups, but not with the adults of these species. If you find large mammals that are injured or in distress, you need to contact animal control if it is in the city of Edmonton, and Fish & Wildlife in the countryside."



## Abandoned Babies

Some of the most frequent calls to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society revolve around baby hares and fawns that people assume are abandoned. In most instances, this is not the case. Hares and fawns have no scent when they are first born. This protects them from predators who can't smell them. The mothers will hide these babies in a camouflaged area and go forage for themselves. Mother hares only come back to feed their babies a couple of times a day - this way they don't attract predators to their relatively defenceless young. People may think the babies are abandoned or orphaned, but the mother likely isn't that far away. The best option is to leave them where they are until the mother returns to find them.

What do you do when a well-meaning child brings a baby hare home? Cheryl tells us that "a lot of people assume that wild animals will abandon their young if they've been in contact with humans and picked up their smell - but this isn't really the case. The best bet is to bring the baby hare back exactly where the child found it. It might be a good idea to rub your hands in dirt first to camouflage your scent - but even if you don't do this the mother likely won't be bothered by the human smell. She will probably come back and move the baby within twenty-four hours."



## Pets & Wild Animals

It's instinctive for cats to chase after birds and small animals. They don't need to eat these birds, as they are already well fed, so they just leave them on the porch as "gifts" for their owners. A good way to protect wild birds and animals is by keeping your pets inside, or keeping them on a leash. Cheryl adds that "this is particularly important in the spring and summer months as there are a lot of baby birds and animals around and they are easy pickings. If your cat does bring in a bird or small mammal, and it's still alive, call the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society right away and we will direct you to the nearest veterinary clinic in your area. Cats have a protein in their saliva that wildlife respond to right away - so the animals will need an antidote to that protein fairly quickly."

## Nestlings & Fledglings

Baby birds are divided into nestlings and fledglings. Nestlings are very young birds - they have no feathers and their eyes are closed. Fledglings are a little bit older and bigger and are covered with down or feathers. If a nestling falls out of the nest, you should put it back right away. Don't worry about the mother rejecting it because of the human scent - birds have a terrible sense of smell.

If you see a fledgling away from the nest, though, you probably don't need to worry about it. In cartoons, mother birds give their fledglings a push out of the nest and the young birds are immediately soaring gracefully. In real life, it doesn't always work out that way. Fledgling birds learn to fly the same way human babies learn to walk - by trial and error. When mother birds nudge their babies out, chances are they are going to hit every branch on the way down. It just takes them a little while to earn their wings. Cheryl tells us that "if you have any concerns about whether or not you should be helping a baby bird, give the Society a call and we will help you to assess the situation. Just make sure you leave your cats inside while the fledglings are learning to fly!"



## Injured Birds

A common source of injury for birds comes when they fly into a window. Sometimes they don't see the window and fly into it by accident. Other times, they see their own reflection in the window, assume that it's another bird, and attack it. Cheryl points out that "this is particularly common in the spring when birds are competing for mates and defending their territory."

In most cases, birds that fly into windows are just temporarily stunned. You can help them out by putting on gloves, picking them up with a tea towel, and putting them into a box. Put the box into a safe place until the

bird has had a chance to recover naturally. Once they have recovered, you can simply let them fly off. If you notice any blood or swelling, call the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society and they will tell you what to do.

In some instances, the birds may need to be brought in to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society. Cheryl tells us that “when this happens, we give the people who brought the birds in a case number so they can follow up on them to see how they are doing. If they recover, and are able to be released back into the wild, we offer these people the chance to come down and release the birds themselves. It’s a really exhilarating experience to see an animal you’ve helped out returned to the wild.”

The Society accepts all kinds of different species of birds. This includes some of the more exotic birds, like owls, hawks and eagles, as well as everyday birds like crows, magpies and seagulls. “We don’t think of any of them as *nuisance* birds that aren’t worth helping,” says Cheryl. “Everything has its place in the ecosystem.”



## Not Domesticated

Staff with the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society feel strongly that wild animals need to be treated like wild animals. Cheryl points out that “when people try to help out a wild animal, the animal doesn’t realize they are trying to help. What they see is a huge predator with big teeth. You don’t pet a wild animal to reassure it the way you would a cat or dog. Any time you are in close contact with the animal, you increase its stress level.”

People working and volunteering at the Society minimize their contact with birds and animals, only coming near them when:

- 1) They are being examined.
- 2) Their cages are being cleaned.
- 3) They are getting medication.
- 4) They are being fed.

During the summer months, a number of volunteers help to feed baby birds that have been orphaned or abandoned. They use tweezers or syringes to give foods to the birds so that they can minimize physical contact. Once the birds get older, they generally reject all contact with humans and the food is simply left in their cages. Cheryl tells us that "it's actually a good sign when the birds start to reject contact with people. It shows that their defence mechanisms and survival instincts are intact, and ensures they will probably do well when released into the wild."

Predators like foxes and coyotes need to learn how to hunt if they are to survive in the wild. The Wildlife Rehabilitation Society has had a lot of success sending orphaned fox kits off to live with older foxes that act as foster parents at the Cochrane Ecological Institute.



## Keep It Clean

People often throw chocolate bar wrappers or potato chip bags out of the windows of their cars. Animals smell the food residue left in the packaging and come to investigate - and all too often they are hit by cars. Another concern is when people dump shells from sunflower seeds on sidewalks or roadways. Birds recognize the shells immediately and swoop down for a closer look - often getting killed or injured by cars.

What can all of us do to make our province a safer place for our furry and feathered friends? The answer is simple - we can keep it clean! Cheryl notes that "we recently started a joint campaign with Capital City Cleanup that focuses on the importance of keeping public places clean. If we don't have garbage lying around, birds and animals won't be drawn to it."

## Making Amends

Should we be helping wild animals? Some people feel we should let nature take its course and let the animals fend for themselves. Cheryl counters this argument by pointing out that "the six main reasons animals are brought in to our Society include being caught by a cat, hit by a car, shot by a gun, electrocuted, poisoned by environmental toxins or caught in some sort of man-made product. All of these incidents are ultimately caused by human intervention."

Many species are endangered or even facing extinction because of habitat loss caused by human development. We owe it to the other species on the planet to make amends and help make up for some of the damage we've caused them.

**If you wish to report a bird or small mammal that is sick or distressed, call the Wildlife Hotline Number at 780 914-4118.**

**For more information on the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton, visit their website at [www.wildlife-edm.ca](http://www.wildlife-edm.ca)**

### Some of the 106 species that were helped in 2007

#### Mammals

Common Porcupine  
Woodchuck  
White-Tail Prairie Hare  
Snowshoe Hare  
Red Squirrel  
Northern Flying Squirrel  
Big Brown Bat  
Pocket Gopher  
Richardson's Ground Squirrel  
Long-Tailed Weasel  
Muskrat  
Coyote  
Red Fox  
Moose  
White Tailed Deer

#### Birds

Bald Eagle  
Red-Tailed Hawk  
Swainson's Hawk  
Northern Goshawk  
Coopers Hawk  
Sharp-Shinned Hawk  
Osprey  
Peregrine Falcon  
Merlin  
American Kestrel  
Great-Horned Owl  
Snowy Owl  
Short-Eared Owl  
Northern Hawk Owl

Ruby-Throated Hummingbird  
Belted Kingfisher  
Northern Flicker  
Pileated Woodpecker  
Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker  
Northern Saw-Whet Owl  
Red-Necked Grebe  
Eared Grebe  
Great Blue Heron  
Tundra Swan  
Canada Goose  
Mallard Duck  
Blue Winged Teal  
Redhead Duck  
Greater Scaup  
Lesser Scaup  
Goldeneye (Common)  
Bufflehead  
Surf Scoter  
Ruddy Duck  
American Coot  
Common Snipe  
Lesser Yellowlegs  
California Gull  
Ring Billed Gull  
Franklin's Gull  
Common Tern  
Cowbird  
Ruffed Grouse  
Gray Partridge  
Bluejay  
Black-Billed Magpie  
American Crow

Downy Woodpecker  
Yellow-Bellied Flycatcher  
Black-Capped Chickadee  
White/Red-Breasted Nuthatch  
House Wren  
Grey Catbird  
American Robin  
Hermit Thrush  
Swainson's Thrush  
Mountain Bluebird  
Bohemian Waxwing  
Cedar Waxwing  
Red-Eyed Vireo  
Tennessee Warbler  
Orange-Crowned Warbler  
Yellow Warbler  
Connecticut Warbler  
Evening Grosbeak  
Pine Grosbeak  
Common Redpoll  
Pine Siskin  
Savannah Sparrow  
Grasshopper Sparrow  
Chipping Sparrow  
Fox Sparrow  
Vesper Sparrow  
White Throated Sparrow  
Brewer's Blackbird  
Rusty Blackbird  
Common Raven  
European Starling  
House Sparrow  
Morning Dove



It is estimated that the last remaining rainforests could be consumed in less than 40 years.