

CONSERVATION



Supporting Wildlife and Giving Them a Chance at Life

Wildlife Rescue Association of BC is known for its wildlife hospital and rehabilitation facility. Around 5,000 wild animals in need are admitted every year.

Wildlife Rescue also operates the Support Centre, which is operated 7 days a week, 365 days a year, to assist the public with questions about wildlife and help with any wildlife situation.

Working with our team, the most challenging task is to determine which animals truly need to come into care and which need to be left where they are. This is especially important during spring and summer when fledgling birds are found on the ground and thought to be injured when in fact, they are perfectly healthy and progress-

ing through a normal stage of development as they learn to fly.

In August 2000, a young Glaucous-winged Gull was found orphaned in Vancouver and brought to Wildlife Rescue by a worried wildlife friend. Thanks to the community's support, the gull received a second chance and was raised at the Wildlife Hospital. The bird learned how to swim and forage, and received expert care to grow into a healthy, strong juvenile. After a month in care, the gull had developed all the critical skills needed to survive in the wild.

Just prior to being successfully released at Belcarra's shoreline, the bird was banded by Master Bander Liz Thunstrom. The purpose of banding is to gain knowledge about the survival

rate of birds treated in care after being released into their natural habitats. It helps researchers understand how well orphaned birds raised in captivity adapt to life in the wild, and how those that have recovered from ailments go on to succeed in the wild.

Fast forward to February 2024: the now mature gull was recaptured in White Rock by researchers from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) as part of their Salish Sea Gull Project.* The bird was fitted with several new coloured bands to make them easily identifiable from a distance and was spotted in White Rock again in September.

"I was very surprised and pleased to hear of this recapture report after 24 years! This more than exceeded my



After growing up in care at Wildlife Rescue, this gull was spotted in the wild again 24 years later.

hopes for its future when the bird was originally released back into the wild after banding,” said Thunstrom. “It would be interesting to know what experiences the bird had in those years and how many young it produced in that time, but most satisfying is that it survived and did so well!”

The Salish Sea Gull Project is an integral part of the Salish Sea Marine Bird Monitoring and Conservation Program. This five-year initiative is especially significant as gull species are protected under the Migratory Birds Convention Act of 1994 and have been identified as a stewardship priority by ECCC.

“[We are] conducting research on Glaucous-winged Gulls as indicators of the health of the Salish Sea, the idea being that if the ocean is healthy, the birds will be healthy,” said Dr. Mark Hipfner, ECCC Research Scientist. “As part of the larger project, we are banding gulls with unique combinations of colour bands to quantify age-specific survival rates. This individual confirms for us that these gulls can live good, long lives.”

Watching an animal arrive at the Wildlife Hospital in critical condition, recover, and return to the wild is one of the most rewarding parts of wildlife rehabilitation. Occasionally, we’re treated to something even more special: hearing that a past patient is not just surviving but thriving, even decades later!

Before Wildlife Rescue was founded in 1979, there was no existing rehabilitation service for wildlife in Metro Vancouver, and members of the public had nowhere to turn to when they found wildlife in distress. Today, over 45 years later, Wildlife Rescue treats animals from all over the province and provides emergency response services for wildlife, all with the support of donations.

Over 85% of the organization’s funding comes through individual donations. During challenging times of declining donations, worsened by the nationwide cost-of-living crisis, the critical need for public support is greatly emphasized. Without funding and support from individuals, businesses, municipalities, and the wider community, none of the work Wildlife Rescue does would be possible.

Thanks to the ongoing support from dedicated and compassionate individuals across Canada, Wildlife Rescue is able to provide leadership in rehabilitating wildlife and in promoting the welfare of wild animals in the urban environment.

Have you seen a banded gull? Your sighting could help conservation efforts! Report colour-banded gulls to the Salish Sea Gull Project and contribute to ongoing research. If you see a banded gull, you are encouraged to submit your sightings and upload your photos to <http://salishseagullproject.shinyapps.io/submit-observation-form/> or by email to Mark.Hipfner@ec.gc.ca

This article was originally published in the Spring 2025 issue of To the Rescue, Wildlife Rescue’s quarterly newsletter. You can find this and other inspiring stories of survival at <https://www.wildliferescue.ca/what-we-do/newsletters/>

**This research project was conducted under the appropriate permits.*