



Wildlife Responsibility Bulletin

Winter Team Update: Applied Expertise, Real-World Impact



Michelle Bellizzi, Response and Training Manager, leads an Oiled Wildlife Response Training with the Wildlife Rescue Association of British Columbia.

This last quarter of the year showed how preparedness directly improves outcomes for oiled wildlife, reinforcing our role as a trusted partner through hands-on field work and global training.

In October, International Bird Rescue experts contributed to international capacity-building at the Effects of Oil on Wildlife Con-

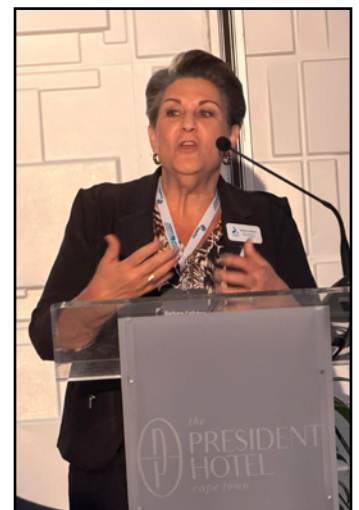
ference in Cape Town, South Africa. Barbara Callahan, Michelle Bellizzi, and Kylie Clatterbuck led a half-day “Oil Spills 101” workshop for 20 emerging responders, while Dr. Rebecca Duerr, Bellizzi, Callahan, and Clatterbuck presented scientific papers. The gathering also honored responders to the 2000 Treasure Oil Spill.

Later in the month,

preparedness translated into action. Callahan and Julie Skoglund delivered our annual Oiled Wildlife First Responder Training for longtime partner Alyeska Pipeline Service Company in Valdez. Days later, our Southern California team shifted into active response during the Ventura oiled bird incident, admitting significant numbers of oiled animals from the Ventu-

ra Harbor area.

Together, these efforts reflect a strong year of impact. In 2025, Bird Rescue delivered 16 oiled wildlife response trainings, equipping 1,350 responders to act quickly and collaboratively when wildlife needs us most. Looking ahead, January brings an Oiled Wildlife First Response Training in Washington’s San Juan Islands, alongside early planning with federal and regional partners to strengthen refuge-level preparedness.



Barbara Callahan presents at the 2025 Effects of Oil on Wildlife Conference in Cape Town, South Africa.



An oiled Great Blue Heron perches by a creek in Slidell, LA, drawing attention from onlookers captivated by its unusual appearance.

A Heron’s Lesson in Why Awareness Matters

When a striking, all-black heron appeared in Slidell, Louisiana, it captivated birders online. Many assumed the bird had a rare genetic condition called melanism. In reality, it was a Great Blue Heron coated in oil, showing how contamination is not always obvious.

Oiled wildlife does not always look distressed at first glance. Oil can coat feathers evenly, creating a dark, glossy appearance rather than a more typical matted look. Wildlife may mask illness, continuing to hunt or move normally until the physical toll becomes fatal. In this case, subtle warning signs included unusual feather sheen, residue on the bill, excessive preening, limited flight, and reduced evasion of people.

A local resident recognized that something was not right and contacted International Bird Rescue. Drawing on decades of oil spill response experience and year-round aquatic wildlife care, our experts reviewed photos and videos and confirmed the bird needed immediate professional intervention.

The heron did not survive, but [its story](#) leaves a clear lesson: when a wild animal looks unusual or out of place, do not rely on assumptions or online speculation. Contact trained wildlife professionals who assess these cases every day. Early guidance leads to faster response, better care, and lives saved.

Trusted Partnership Saves Wildlife

International Bird Rescue is honored to be featured in the [new Dawn commercial](#), celebrating a partnership that has supported oiled wildlife rescue for more than 45 years. This year’s ad highlights the real work behind recovery, featuring species our team cares for every year, including Western Grebes and Surf Scoters, along with Bird Rescue staff in action. Email partners@birdrescue.org to connect.



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Looking Forward: A Calendar Celebrating 55 Years of Care



Fifty-five years after a single oil spill compelled concerned individuals to act, International Bird Rescue enters 2026 rooted in the same mission that launched our work: to inspire people to act toward balance with the natural world by rescuing waterbirds in crisis.

Born in response to oil spills, Bird Rescue pioneered the care of oiled wildlife. While oil remains a critical focus, birds in a changing world now face compounding threats including habitat loss, environmental toxins, disease, and starvation. Nearly 3 billion birds have been lost over



the past 55 years, underscoring the urgency of adaptive, science-based conservation in action.

Our 2026 calendar reflects this evolution, marking a year of preparedness, partnership, and care for wildlife. It offers a way to recognize the shared knowledge and collaboration that allow rescue to scale across six continents and save more lives.

We invite partners and clients to commemorate 55 years of rescue by sharing the 2026 calendar with their teams or communities. [Visit our website](#) to purchase a calendar and use code **WRB20** to get 20% off.

An Unexpected Winner: Western Gull Selected as 2025 Patient of the Year

She wasn’t rare or flashy, but in 2025, a Western Gull made history as International Bird Rescue’s first-ever gull named Patient of the Year.

This adult female was admitted after being shot in Wilmington, California, with severe injuries including fractures to her keel and pubic bone, which are often fatal for birds. When she arrived on August 5, survival was far from certain. After a month of intensive care, she defied expectations and was strong enough to return to the coast, released alongside two other gulls.

Her story carried an extraordinary detail. She arrived wearing a federal leg band. Records revealed she had been banded as a chick near Santa Catalina Island in

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Wildlife Responsibility Tip



INTERNATIONAL BIRD RESCUE

DON'T WASH BIRDS AT HOME!

Attempting to clean oiled birds and other wildlife is extremely stressful, dangerous, and can even be fatal for the animal.

Leave rehabilitation care to professionals!

Call for Help, Don't Wash

If you encounter a bird or other wildlife contaminated with oil, grease, or an unknown substance, please do not attempt to wash the animal yourself. Improper cleaning can seriously harm the animal, reduce its chances of survival, and put you at risk. Safely washing oiled wildlife requires specialized training, equipment, and protocols.

If you find an animal in distress, contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center or animal control agency so trained professionals can respond. If you are unsure whether an animal is contaminated, this checklist can help guide you. When in doubt, reach out to a professional.



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second chance through 2004, making her 21 years old at the time of intake, well beyond the average lifespan of a Western Gull. For two decades, she survived storms, pollution, food scarcity, and human encroachment, only to be brought down by violence and given a bigger story.

SIGNS OF CONTAMINATED WILDLIFE	
COMMON INDICATORS	DESCRIPTION
Changes in feather condition	Feathers may look darker, slick, unusually shiny, or overly uniform in color, and no longer repel water. In other cases, feathers can appear matted, clumped, stringy, or disheveled.
Altered behavior	Birds may allow people to approach more closely than normal, seem lethargic, abnormally “friendly”, solicit food, or isolate itself from other birds.
Impaired movement or flight	Birds may struggle to take off, fly only short distances, or have difficulty maintaining balance.
Excessive preening or shaking	These behaviors can indicate discomfort, being chilled, or an attempt to remove an irritant from the feathers.
Beaching or remaining on shore	Diving birds, in particular, may come ashore when contamination prevents them from staying warm or buoyant on the water.
Unusual coloration on bare parts	Darkening or staining on the beak, legs, or feet can be a clue that a bird has come into contact with oil or another substance.

The Wildlife Responsibility Bulletin is published by International Bird Rescue for its customers. **Editors:** Emily Dixon, Ariana Gastelum, JD Bergeron, and Daniel Flynn. **Photos:** JD Bergeron, Cheryl Reynolds, and Ariana Gastelum. **Design:** Ariana Gastelum