



Wildlife Responsibility Bulletin

For Birds in a Changing World: Introducing New Tagline

Since 1971, International Bird Rescue has responded to more than 265 oil spills and other emergencies, caring for over 170,000 birds across six continents. Fifty-five years ago, there was no playbook for oil spill response. Bird Rescue established protocols, conducted research, developed response plans, and trained responders. For five decades, that foundation has expanded into world-class research, training, preparedness,



**INTERNATIONAL
BIRD RESCUE**

FOR BIRDS IN A CHANGING WORLD

and response services capable of meeting emerging threats.

From pelican strandings to harmful algal blooms to bird flu, each emergency shares the same story: a world shifting faster than the sys-

tems built to protect it. Nearly three billion birds have disappeared from North America in fifty years.

Every bird returned to the wild is a deliberate act of hope, and a step toward slowing that loss.

This anniversary, we formally adopt the tagline that has grown quietly alongside our work: For Birds in a Changing World.

To our Wildlife Responsibility partners who have taken this journey with us, some since the beginning: Thank you. Oil spill response remains our foundation. We invite you to explore ways to expand our partnership to better protect wildlife in a changing world. [Read more from CEO.](#)



International Bird Rescue and partners respond to an Elegant Tern colony nesting on two barges in the Long Beach Harbor in July 2021.

International Bird Rescue
Staff Spotlight:
Danene Birtell



Danene Birtell, Preparedness Manager for Bird Rescue

Some people find their calling in a classroom. Danene Birtell found hers on a beach in South Africa. In 2000, she got herself to Cape Town when the Merchant Vessel named Treasure sank, releasing tons of fuel oil

into one of the world's most critical African Penguin breeding grounds. It was her first major oil spill response, and it had a profound impact.

That response is where Birtell first worked alongside Jay Holcomb and Barbara Callahan. Holcomb mentored her through waterproofing and bird grading protocols and wrote her a letter of recommendation in the middle of a crisis. She never forgot it.

Birtell is one of many wildlife professionals who trace their path back to Bird Rescue, where hands-on response work offers access to world-class training that has

launched careers across veterinary science and wildlife rescue. Driven to understand not just what rehabilitators do but why, she went on to earn an Associate of Applied Science in Veterinary Technology and built a career spanning



Danene Birtell checks newly-washed African Penguins' waterproof feathers during the 2000 MV Treasure Spill.

'Goth Heron' Update: What We Learned

Since we published [our story](#) on the all-black heron spotted in Slidell, LA, in January, the birding community has followed

the case closely. The bird's striking appearance sparked debate online, with many convinced it was a rare melanistic her-

on, not oil exposure. We now have answers.

Lab results from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries have confirmed what our team suspected. The juvenile Great Blue Heron's feathers were stained by oil, not a rare genetic condition. According to a report in [nola.com](#), the necropsy identified multiple factors: extreme emaciation, a severe gastrointestinal parasite infection, and exposure to petroleum products. The parasite load, common in debilitated wildlife, was a symptom of her decline

rather than its cause.

The findings are important. This heron's story is now a documented case study in how oiling can go unrecognized, even when every feather is affected. The more we understand, the better equipped we all are to act in time.

Sandra Akhtar, whose early concern helped bring attention to this bird, said it best: "We all need to do better next time."

If you encounter a bird in distress, call our free HelpLine: 866-SOS-BIRD (866-767-2473).

April 2026

more than 35 oiled wildlife incidents.

When the Preparedness Manager position opened at IBR, she answered the call.

"She's coming home," Bellizzi said. "She's family." Read full story [here](#).

International Bird Rescue
Spring Team
Update

The most effective response begins long before a crisis. The first quarter of 2026 kept International Bird Rescue's response and training team moving across time zones and terrain. In January, Barbara Callahan, Senior Director of Response Services, and Michelle Bellizzi, Response and Training Manager, led an Oiled Wildlife First Responder Training for the Island Oil Spill Association on Orcas Island, Washington.

February brought a ten-person team led by CEO JD Bergeron, Julie Skoglund, Senior Director of Operations and Programs, and Bellizzi to Marathon Renewables in Martinez, CA, for an Oiled Wildlife Assessment including capture



Barbara Callahan, Senior Director of Response Services, presents an Oiled Wildlife First Response training in Cordova, AK.

drills and wildlife deterrence recommendations.

In March, Callahan and Bellizzi joined TetraTech at Quivira Wildlife Refuge in Kansas to assess wildlife risk for a Wildlife Response Plan during spring migration while significant spring numbers of waterfowl and cranes underscored

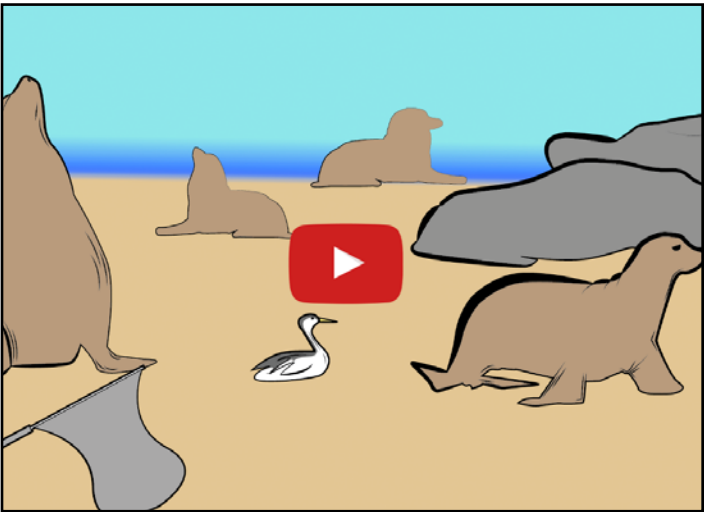
what was at stake. Back-to-back Industrial Wildlife Response training followed in Forks, WA, and Juneau, AK, along with an APSC First Responder Training in Cordova, AK, alongside Kylie Clatterbuck, SoCal Wildlife Center Manager.

In April, Bellizzi and Danene Birtell, who

joined Bird Rescue this spring, represented the organization at the Global Oiled Wildlife Response System meeting in Ostende, Belgium. Birtell's arrival brings together three of the most experienced oiled wildlife responders in the field, with a shared history that spans decades.



State lab results confirmed the all-black heron found in Louisiana was a Great Blue Heron with feathers stained by oil.



Adrian Gastelum created an animated re-enactment of Dan Vega's recount rescuing an oiled grebe surrounded by sea lions.

Oiled Bird Rescue Animated Re-enactment

During the Ventura oil incident in November 2025, responders Dan Vega and Alex Carver faced an unexpected obstacle: an oiled grebe surrounded by sea lions. Because sea lions are federally protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the team couldn't simply move in.

They had to improvise. In this [animated reenactment](#), Vega shares the moment and the quick thinking it required, depicted through the artwork of Adrian Gastelum, who lent his talent to bring the scene to life. It's a rare look at the problem-solving that defines real field response.

Wildlife Responsibility Tip

Don't Kidnap that Baby Bird!

There's no denying that ducklings pull on our heartstrings, but sometimes our interference hurts more than it helps. Each spring, Bird Rescue raises up to 1,000 baby birds, some orphaned, some accidentally taken by caring people. A baby bird's best chance is to be raised by its parents. No rehabilitation center can replicate what a wild upbringing provides. Observe first, then follow the steps on the right.



The first clutch of Mallards arrive at Bird Rescue on April 4, 2026.



Wait! Wait! Don't Kidnap Me!

There's no denying that ducklings pull on our heartstrings, but sometimes our interference hurts more than it helps.

BEFORE TAKING ACTION, OBSERVE



How many ducklings are there?

Sometimes ducklings can get separated from their mother. Because ducks can't count, mothers usually do not return for missing babies.

If you have found an entire clutch, **it's likely that parents are close by**. Allow the ducklings time & space to see if their mother returns.

If you have found a lone duckling or a small group of 1-3, it's possible they've been abandoned. If parents are not close by, **it's recommended to seek local animal control or a local wildlife rehab for advice**.

Is the duckling injured?

If the duckling is experiencing any of the following, it needs medical attention & a local animal control or wildlife rehab center should be called.

 Has obvious wounds or blood on its body	 Has had contact with a predator	 Cannot stand, walk, or run
 Covered in bugs	 Feel cold at the touch	 Doesn't react when you get close to it

Find a wildlife rehabilitator near you or contact your local animal control. We're here to help! Call our Bird HelpLine: 866-SOS-BIRD (866-767-2473) Hotline hours: 8AM-5PM PT



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