

# **Critter Creek Chronicle**

Newsletter of Critter Creek Wildlife Station      Summer 2008      Volume 13, No. 2

## CIRCLE OF SUPPORTERS MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Categories	Annual Dues
Student	\$ 10
Senior	\$ 15
Individual	\$ 25
Family	\$ 40
Sponsor	\$ 100
Patron	\$ 250
Corporate or Life	\$ 1000

Make checks payable to:  
Animals for Education

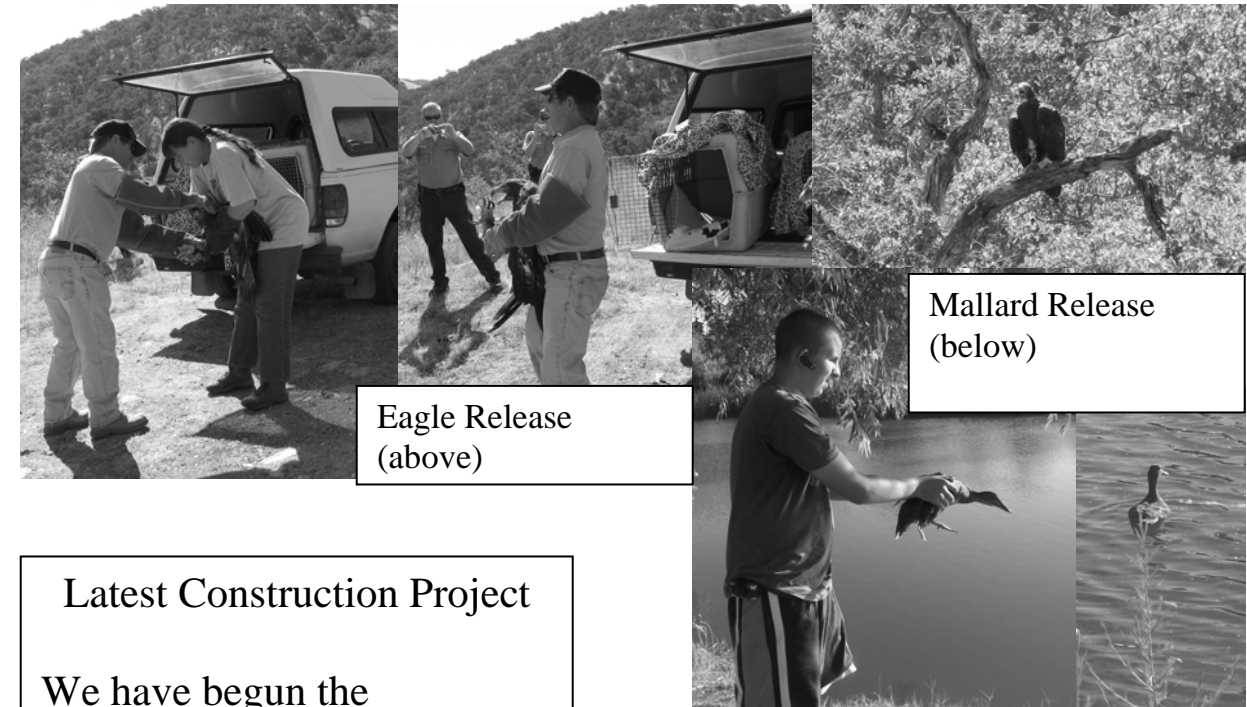
Mail to:  
Critter Creek Wildlife Station  
36710 Sand Creek Road  
Squaw Valley, CA 93675

Members receive our quarterly newsletter

If you haven't renewed your membership in the last 18 months, this will be your last newsletter.

Please renew your membership; we appreciate your support.

## Start of Release Season



Eagle Release (above)

Mallard Release (below)

### Latest Construction Project

We have begun the intermediate hawk flight cage. If you wish to lend a hand, please call us at (559) 338-2415.



## Open House

Saturday, September 20<sup>th</sup>  
11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.  
Last tour begins at 1:30 p.m.



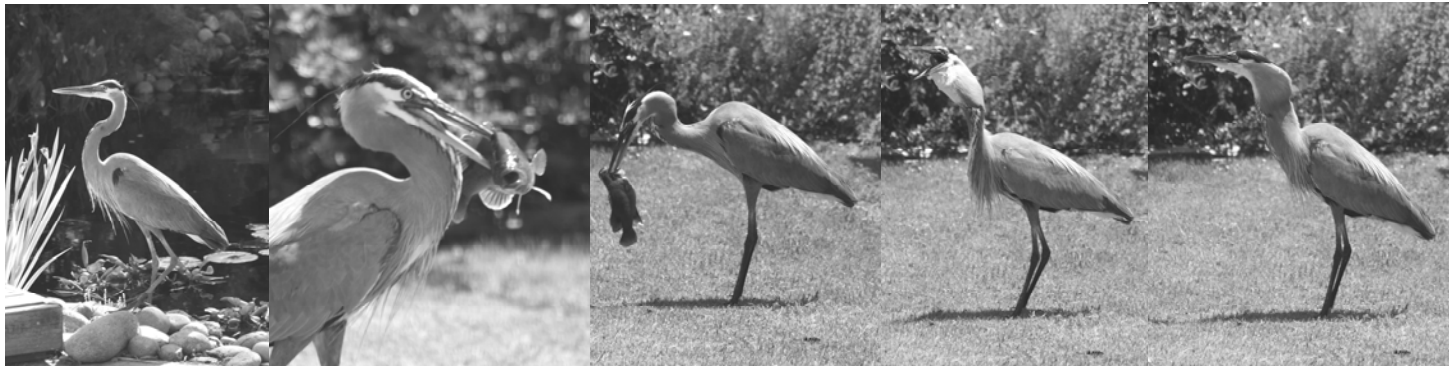
**Critter Creek Chronicle**  
 Animals for Education

Non-Profit Org.  
 U.S. Postage  
 PAID  
 Oriskany, CA  
 Permit No. 6

## THOSE RASCALLY HERONS

For those of you who have beloved koi ponds, this may not be the article for you or may be it is the very article you need to read. We often get frantic calls from people who have had their pond raided by heron often downing very expensive koi by the dozens. When asked when the heron will leave our answer has to be, “How many fish are left in your pond?” They usually do not appreciate the humor in the reply.

Sadly this is a wildlife encounter becoming more prevalent and people aren't finding it enjoyable. For many of them their pond and the, often, friendly fish represent a slice of peaceful nature where they can get away from the stresses of their lives. Then in comes a heron and within a few minutes their slice of peaceful nature looks like a scene from Texas Chainsaw Massacre. They cannot believe that the heron found their pond in the middle of a housing development. What they fail to realize is that heron are flying overhead constantly on the lookout for their next meal. Another misconception is that if the fish are large enough they will escape death. As the pictures indicate heron are capable of “downing” huge fish. Another person complained that they wouldn't mind the few fish it might take to curb the heron's appetite but at her pond it killed most of the fish but only ate a few.



The heron flew in, scouted the pond, stabbed his meal, flipped it around, and swallowed it without any problem.

Here are a few tips we have found helpful:

- Build a gazebo, place shade cloth, or plant trees over the pond to help “hide” the pond from the heron flying over
- Make the pond deep enough with enough plants for the fish to hide
- When you see them, make noise in order to make them fly away, disturb them repeatedly...having a dog in the yard helps
- Make the sides of the pond steep drop offs
- Finally one suggestion from the UK states “Technology and ingenuity offer a number of variations on the theme of trip wires that can be invisible, electrified, infrared and ultrasonic, which can hum, emit terrifying bangs, ear piercing shrieks or chatter and squirt a spray of water. They all work to a certain extent—until the bird gets used to it or finds a way round it.”

Having listed all of these tips, we have tried them all and we still have a heron fly in, then walk under the shade cloth to get to the fish in the bio-filter for Web-Foot Wash and Heron Creek. The ponds in Web-Foot Wash and Heron Creek are fenced in even from above, so the wild herons cannot get to them.

The purpose for our ponds is to give the ducks, geese and marsh birds a chance to swim and hunt as they would in the wild before we release them, so having wild heron come in and raid the bio-filter is like a training film for the orphaned and recovering birds. Nonetheless now that we are dealing with ponds and fish, we can appreciate the frustration those koi pond owners experience. I know it is of little solace but one has to admit herons are exquisitely designed to hunt fish and one has to appreciate their incredible ability to persevere despite obstacles placed their path.

## SCARY DIETS

Occasionally we receive calls for information on how to care for young wildlife. We try to counsel the individual about state law and the benefits of having knowledgeable rehabbers take over the care. Recently we were able, after several contacts, to convince a caller to surrender a young red-tailed hawk that she said she had been feeding raw hamburger. We explained the inadequacies of such a diet. The proper diet we suggested was not very appealing to her, so she finally handed over the young hawk. We are glad she did—we immediately started the hawk on whole prey cut up into bite-sized pieces for easier digestion. We were quite shocked at the first pellet it coughed up. The picture shows the extensive concentration of BIRD SEED, an absolutely inappropriate food for a bird of prey. After several days of being fed properly, he coughed up the pellet pictured next to the first one. Critical to good rehabilitating of wildlife is a clear understanding of their diet and habitat. When we receive calls inquiring about the habits of certain wildlife, we are happy to share what information we have, but when the health of an animal is at stake we try to encourage the public to do what is best for the animal and transport it to a rehabilitation facility.



## Northern Harrier Hawks

Critter Creek's Web-Foot Wash enclosure has been an on going project. It has been a challenge to try to make it suitable for all the orphaned wild ducks, geese, heron and egrets that come in during the year. The waterfowl enclosure is separated into a swimming side, Web-Foot Wash, and a marsh side for the non-swimmers, Heron Creek. This year, we haven't had a lot of orphaned and injured heron and egrets, so we decided to use the marsh area to rehabilitate six baby northern harrier hawks, once known as marsh hawks. At once, they settled in and began flying circles over the collection of ponds and streams that make up the Heron Creek portion of the enclosure. According to most field guides, the Northern Harrier hawk prefers both fresh water and salt marshes. It also is frequently found over grasslands and cultivated areas of alfalfa and grain fields making it a common sight in the Central Valley. The harrier nests on the ground which is a bit unusual for a hawk and which also dooms many young when grain fields are harvested. These hawks are unusual in other ways. They have an owl-like facial feature--a ruff of feathers that form a facial disk, and, as with owls, helps to direct sound to the ear openings giving them acute hearing. The harrier hawk is also easy to identify because of the large white rump patch at the base of the tail which is apparent in the young as well as the adults. Its flight appears erratic as it glides and dips over fields in search of small prey. These hawks are beneficial to farmers since their primary prey are rats, mice, ground squirrels, and voles. Currently they are listed as a California Species of Special Concern. The young harriers we currently have were from two different nests in a field about to be plowed. Fortunately the owner took the time to get them to a rehabilitation center. Once these hawks have demonstrated their ability to hunt, we will be releasing them into a suitable habitat.

