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Crittter Creek Wildlife Station
36710 Sand Creek Road
Squaw Valley, CA 93675



Newsletter of Crittter Creek Wildlife Station Summer 2016 Volume 21, No. 2

Betty White (Common Egret)

Egretta alba

Sadly we must report that Betty White died on April 28th of this year.

She was the oldest avian resident at Crittter Creek. She arrived injured in October of 1992. She was an adult at that time, so it is hard to estimate how old she actually was at the time of her death. Betty White was missing her left wing from a collision with a guide wire. She lived in a mew where she could easily get to her water and food. She was even able to occasionally sneak up on a visiting sparrow and supplement her diet. She lived at Crittter Creek over 23 years and had settled in fairly well with the wildlife station's routine. She was still shy and preferred to keep people at a distance. She will be missed.

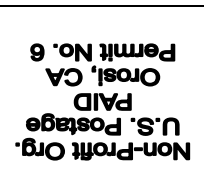


Egrets are slender white birds. They stand tall on their long black legs and pose with slim necks pulled in until a fish or frog is located in the water. In careful, slow movements, the long neck stretches out and the bird stalks in slow-motion until it is within striking distance. Then-a sudden flash of a long yellow sword-beak and fish or frog is caught, twisted about, swallowed. Not many years ago, egrets almost went extinct. It was fashionable for ladies to wear egret plumes on their hats, and to satisfy this whim the hunters slaughtered thousands of adult birds at a time when young were in the nests. Finally laws were passed prohibiting the possession of the plumes. They have recovered and are now plentiful (Eifert, 10).

WE CAN USE MORE VOLUNTEERS

Crittter Creek could not operate if it wasn't for all the volunteers that donate hundreds of hours. Dan and I receive no financial compensation for the 10-12 hour days we put in just about each week of the year. Every day we have to feed, water, and clean both in the morning and evening with no exceptions. Dan usually gets stuck with the phone duties. He is able to refer callers to various volunteers around the valley who are able (at their own expense) to pick up and give initial care to wildlife until the animal can be transported to Crittter Creek or our vet at San Joaquin Veterinary Hospital. Dr. Stocks and his staff donate their care. These are labors of love for all those involved in keeping Crittter Creek going. If you are interested in helping, give us a call or check out our web page at www.critttercreek.org to volunteer. Call to make arrangements to come on a Saturday to learn what volunteering options are available. That number is 559-338-2415.

Crittter Creek Chronicle
Animals for Education



WE ARE AN “ALL VOLUNTEER” ORGANIZATION

What I mean by this is that we do not belong to any government agency. We are not paid to operate Critter Creek Wildlife Station.

We are incredibly busy right now with both orphaned and injured animals. We try not to get crabby but here are a few of the interactions we must deal with:

Caller: “We have a opossum in our back yard. You need to come and get it out of here right now.”

Our response is to explain the benefits of opossums, that they offer virtually no threat and that it is illegal to relocate them. By making a lot of noise, removing cat/dog food from the area, the opossum will more and likely leave in the evening.

Caller response: “Well if you won’t do anything, then I’m going to kill it.” Then they hang up.

We get these regularly. We call them emotional blackmail calls.

Sometimes calls are from overwhelmed mothers trying to deal with several toddlers while trying to protect a little bird that has fallen out of its nest. It takes skill to guide her through the process when she has little help in getting it back into the nest or boxing it up and transporting it.

On occasion a volunteer will make the time to get to a location where some other agency has already picked up the animal or the animal has disappeared. The caller never bothered to give the volunteer a call back to save him time.

Many of our volunteers have a life outside of Critter Creek ...events to attend, medical appointments, jobs to work, etc. We try to emphasize to callers that they can help us best by offering to transport the animal to our vet or to the volunteer if the animal has been boxed up. Sometimes the caller has an attitude about being “put out,” even after we explain that no one is being paid to do this job. Remember some of our volunteers go more than once in a day to the same town to respond to animal emergencies.

We take pride in knowing that every dollar donated to Critter Creek goes to caging materials, food, medical supplies...items that are directly connected to the wildlife we help.

Please be understanding when you contact us and we seem to be a little “snippy.” The last caller may have been rude and/or threatening. We do our best to keep a professional demeanor when dealing with callers but as the season wears on so does our patience. We appreciate the support we receive and we never lose sight of our main goal—saving wildlife. I realize that I am preaching to the choir, but when you pass along our name or number, please let the individual know what it is our volunteers have to deal with.

Feeding Wild Geese and Ducks May Injure Them

They are majestic, often “almost tame” and seem so grateful for the bread you throw to them. However, feeding ducks, geese and other waterfowl can actually harm these animals. Regular hand feeding has many side effects. It may:

- Cause waterfowl to become dependent on people for food as a source and create an artificially high population of birds.
- Lead to conflicts between birds and people where birds congregate and foul playing fields, lawns, golf courses, and public spaces.
- Inhibit birds’ natural instinct to migrate or seek natural food sources.
- Lead to pollution of water bodies resulting in degradation of natural ecosystems.
- Make the birds less fearful of people and cars which leads to traffic delays and dangerous situations.
- Increase the likelihood of waterfowl diseases.
- Increases nutritional problems, the best example of this is “angle wing.”

Angel wing is also known as slipped or crooked wing. It’s a condition that causes the last joint of the wing to twist resulting in the primary or flight feathers sticking out rather than lying smooth against the body as is normal. The primary cause is thought to be a nutritional problem; the problem usually begins when the bird is still growing from an immature bird to fully adult. If it is given excess feed during this time, it can cause the bird to fatten up and grow too rapidly, resulting in one or more of the wing joints becoming deformed, thus resulting in angel wing. One other factor is the type of food given to the waterfowl; most people who feed waterfowl in the park, usually give them white bread. The problem with white bread is that it causes a deficiency in vitamin E, which is found in high levels in the bird’s natural diet such as leaves, seeds and aquatics for proper growth and development. Angel wing does not affect the general health of the bird, and it does not leave it at risk from other health issues, but it does leave them looking very shabby, but more importantly totally unable to fly.



Another problem is disease, when the birds are exposed to a diet, rich in carbohydrates, they defecate more than usual, and all bird feces harbor potentially harmful bacteria, responsible for a number of avian related diseases such as avian botulism, which is a form of avian food poisoning. Moldy bread can also cause a disease known as aspergillosis, a fatal lung affection that can eradicate entire wildfowl flocks. Have you ever visited the park and encountered that goose that seems to be more aggressive than the others? The problem lies with the fact that if the birds have regular access to handouts, they lose their natural fear of humans and become increasingly bold and aggressive. Furthermore the loss of fear of humans can result in other unforeseen hazards, such as bird crossing a busy road, in order to reach a group of picnickers or perhaps another body of water with easily accessible food. We currently have many young Canada geese that have been found with nutritional problems causing their parents to abandon them. Please be aware of the harmful effects feeding geese in run-off basins and parks causing for the population.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS
Critter Creek Wildlife Station will hold its next
Open House on October 1st
Saturday
11:00am-2:00pm

Due to the high volume of young, orphaned wildlife, we are unable to have a Summer Open House. We look forward to seeing you in October.