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# Critter Creek Chronicle

Newsletter of Critter Creek Wildlife Station      Summer 2009      Volume 14, No. 2

Save The Date  
Fall Open House  
Saturday, October 3, 2009  
11:00 am until 2:00 pm  
Gate will close at 1:30 pm  
to allow you enough time to tour

## Update—Shasta Cage

Shasta the mountain lion's wire structure is completed. We are still waiting to finish the doors and the inside section of the enclosure. We have managed to transport two huge tree stumps and a trunk for Shasta to climb and play on. We have also imported a six foot by three foot diameter culvert, and have surrounded it with boulders to create a cozy cave for him to hide in. Also part of the boulder construction is a pond where he can stay cool.



Giant Tree Stump

Giant Tree Stump and Trunk Attached to Culvert

Culvert Covered with Boulders and Pond Area



**Critter Creek Chronicle**  
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White-Faced Ibis

When Bryan Atkinson, a biologist working for the U.S. Geologic Survey, called us on the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, I had no idea what an enormous task faced us. He was working south of Corcoran and had come across a field of silage where ibis were nesting—hundreds of ibis. There was no water anywhere so as the chicks matured and grew mobile but had not yet fledged, they were on a death march to find water. Bryan had tried scores of agencies and we were the only one willing to respond and help. Once our volunteers reached the area, they reported the horrific scene. Dead chicks were everywhere—hit by cars, piled up along the chain link fence that was blocking their march-dying ones and struggling ones. When there is a die-off of this magnitude it is so difficult to triage—to pick this one over another because it might have a better chance to survive.



This is a healthy white-faced ibis about to be released

Only a few of the casualties



Van load heading to Critter Creek



Rehydration Station-Step One

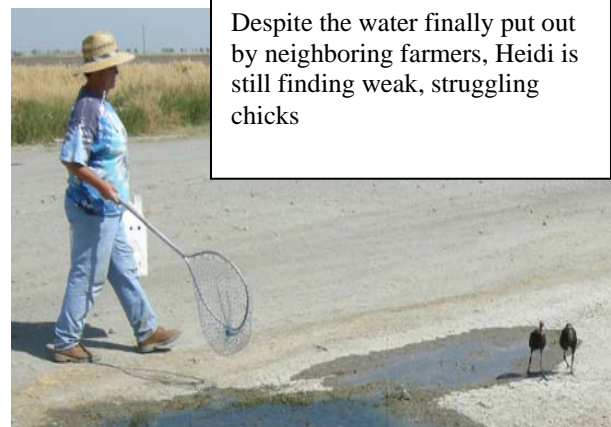


Parents searching for their young in nesting area of field

Memorial Day week was hot and without water more and more chicks would die. Because of the holiday it was impossible to get any government official for a week. Without permission to enter fields, we would be considered trespassers. It didn't matter. The volunteers, just on the roadway alone, were able to fill their vehicle in a few minutes and then begin the drive to Critter Creek. Over that one-week period, we took in 300 birds, but were only able to save 130 or so. The birds were so dehydrated that even rehydrating and introducing food slowly was not enough to save them.

The landowner was contacted but refused to put water on the field; however, other farming operations around the area finally stepped up and ran water nearby. It appears as though the worst is over. White-faced ibis have been having a difficult time since they moved their nesting colonies off the refuges in the area. We hope this same tragedy doesn't occur again next year, though there is evidence that it has happened for a couple of years in a row. Should it happen again, we will be better prepared to respond at the scene by setting up rehydration stations on location. By witnessing these efforts to save these birds, we might also encourage the landowners to help out where they can. The hundreds of white-faced ibis that died at the scene didn't need to die if someone had just made provisions for water.

This has been a learning experience for me. First, I want to thank Heidi Arroues and Tim Schweizer for the hours they gave up over their Memorial Day



Despite the water finally put out by neighboring farmers, Heidi is still finding weak, struggling chicks

week to face the tough job of collecting and transporting the ibis. No amount of money can reimburse them for the sadness of dealing with so much unnecessary suffering.



Pam, Gail, and James grinding food for the masses

I also want to thank Yo-Yo and Wiley, our two resident coyotes for giving up their exercise yard for the first three weeks in order to house the ibis as they became stronger and could leave the infirmary. Once releases began, we were able to move them next to our duck in the Heron Creek enclosure.

Tim Schweizer and John Crane releasing ibis



Release site at Alpaugh Irrigation District

Feeding 130 ibis offers its own set of challenges and I want to thank the many volunteers who overcame their gag reflex and ground up buckets and buckets of food to feed the ibis over the ensuing 5-6 weeks. I also have to thank David Hardt, Fish and Wildlife official in charge of Kern Wildlife Refuge, for providing full-face shields for our volunteers (don't ask).

I had no idea how a "federally protected" status still left a species of bird so totally vulnerable. We are finding it even more difficult to return these birds to the refuges. I have found great allies in the two biologists -John Crane and Tim Schweizer. Tim is also a volunteer for Critter Creek. They were able to locate two sites and within a week were accompanying me to irrigated land that was ideal for releasing 30-35 white-faced ibis. In these locations, the ibis have access to water and an endless supply of insects until it's time for them to migrate.



Recovering ibis in the coyote enclosure

Dave Hardt was able to get permission to place 36 ibis on Alpaugh Irrigation District land. There already were a few ibis in the area so the site was ideal. The remaining ibis will be released in the next few weeks. Several have injuries that might preclude their survival in the wild. We hope to place these ibis at the Monterey Bay Aquarium since they have put out a request to all rehabbers asking for permanently injured ibis.

Permanent Resident: Sterling, California Grey Fox

Meet Sterling, a young grey fox that arrived this spring at Critter Creek. His brothers and sisters were unaffected by the attention the family that first had them showered on the pups. Sterling, absorbed all the affection thus becoming terribly imprinted and unsuitable for release.

Grey fox are unusual because they are capable of climbing trees and unfortunately hen house fences. They are smaller than the red fox found in the Midwest and East Coast, but are larger than the endangered kit fox. Fox are especially shy and timid in the wild and so you might not see them as often as you would their bolder cousin the coyote. Gray foxes are most easily distinguished from the kit fox by the black strip that runs the length of the top of their tail while the kit fox only has a black tipped tail.

Sterling demonstrates the grey foxes' climbing ability by scaling his chain link fence high enough to peek over the safety barrier, then whines for attention. All our volunteers eagerly give him the attention he craves.

