Critter Creek Chronicle

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Newsletter of Critter Creek Wildlife Station **Summer 2024** **Volume 29, No. 2**

Be sure to save Saturday, September 21st
from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm
for our Fall Open House
Come visit!

Busy Baby Season

We are having the usual influx of babies from spring. The real crush is coming from the extreme heat affecting fledgling birds of prey. The youngsters are fleeing their nests, and their parents are unable to care for them. It is hard for us to keep up since we are the only rehab operating from the Grapevine to Stanislaus. People have been cooperative often willing to transport the animals a long distance to get it to us or our veterinarian.





Above: Young Great Horned Owls and Young Hawk
Below: Young Barn Owl and Young Tweety Birds





Below: Gray Fox



Below: Brianna on Food Prep



We got a huge number of opossums early in the season requiring an elaborate feeding process. Following the opossums were raccoons. Most of them required weeks of bottle feeding. It became quite an assembly line, but in the end, they were all chubby juveniles ready for the pre-release cages. Lately we have Cooper's hawk fledglings struggling with the heat. They are dehydrated and hungry.

Changes to Critter Creek

U.S.D.A., as of August of last year, now inspects birds as well as mammals as part of their exhibiting permit. They are enforcing new regulations that are, at times, at odds with regulations for U.S. Fish and Wildlife and Calif. Fish and Wildlife. It took us months and money to come up with compromises to meet the new requirements. With two days to spare, we were able to pass the inspection for our renewal of our exhibiting permit. We want to thank our volunteers for their effort to waterblast, scrape, repair, paint and move birds to try to accommodate the changes.
These new regulations mean that we must close off certain areas of Critter Creek to the public because they are strictly rehabilitation areas. In September, there will be new barriers up in both the compound and across the creek. There is still plenty to see, so plan on visiting.

A Moment in Critter Creek's History

In the year 2000, it became apparent that treating sick and injured wildlife could no longer be done on our back porch of our house. One of our supporters needed to get rid of a single-wide trailer on her property in North Fork. It was a monumental task to tow it out of the ravine and get it to Critter Creek. The trailer was not in good shape but was salvageable.




Above: Cob Webbed Window and Trailer in Place with Ramp and Roof Plastic

Below: Gutted Trailer After Sledge Hammer Work

Once in place, we began the task of getting permits from Fresno County. After several refusals to even consider the project, they figured out that the trailer was so old that it fell under the jurisdiction of the state of California. We contacted the state, and they were incredibly supportive. The trailer had to meet ADA (American Disabilities Act) standards which was great for us. By this time our original veterinarian, Dr. Gentzler, was confined to a wheelchair. We knew we had to strip the entire interior, so we could renovate it into an infirmary. We equipped two teenage boys with sledgehammers to volunteer to do the demolition. They had the time of their lives and within a few hours, there was just a pile of rubble that needed to be cleared away.







Old Bathroom Space, Renovated Hallway and Bathroom

We wanted a food-prep area, an initial medical exam area, and cage banks in the main entry room. A second room we would use as a nursery and a third room we would use for quarantine caging. The trailer would also house a rest room and laundry. Doorways and hallways would be extra wide to accommodate a wheelchair and large transport kennels.

It took us months to frame the interior and walls in each room. We put down industrial flooring, fixed windows and doors, did the plumbing, and electrical work. Most of the work we did ourselves with the advice of plumbers, electricians, and carpenters. Once we passed the state inspection for all that work, it was time to set up the infirmary. We found an old industrial 3-sink unit which has proven invaluable after all of these years. We moved in our stainless-steel cage banks—one for each room. Later we would add cage banks with only a few additional cages. Because the roof of the trailer was in such poor condition, we had to build a self-supporting roof over that covered the entire trailer roof. When we are busy, we are over capacity, so, after 24 years we have outgrown our infirmary!

3-Sink Unit





Stainless-Steel Cage Bank

Self-Supporting Roof over Trailer



We currently have an Xray machine set up in the back room. We are hoping to find an office building we can attach to the back room that would be used to house our Xray equipment making it always at the ready. That would also ease the crowding in the back of the infirmary. This is an example of the way of Critter Creek. We are always expanding and looking for ways to meet the needs of the wildlife we serve.

How to Beat the Heat
(if you're a desert tortoise)

The ideal temperature range for a desert tortoise is 80 degrees F. to 95 degrees F. During the summer, ground temperatures in parts of their range can hit 140 degrees F. To beat the heat, desert tortoises use their strong forearms and tough nails to dig underground burrows where they can hide from the sun. They also seek shady areas to escape the sun. In general, their burrows are 3-3.5 feet. They can spend 90% of their time in these burrows. They are also able to store water in their bladder and to tolerate high levels of urea in their blood to keep it from losing moisture through excessive urinating. They can go for long periods of time without food and water.
Our desert tortoises start to become more active in their winter quarters signaling a move to their outdoor yard enclosures. In the spring when temperature seldom get beyond the 90's, they are busy grazing on spring plants in their enclosures. When temperatures begin to exceed 90 degrees, they search for a place to dig a burrow. The smarter ones do this under their shade canopy giving them added protection from the sun. Once temperatures are above 100 degrees, they seldom surface except in the cool of the mornings to eat. If we don't feed them early in the morning, they have already retired to their burrows until the following morning. They always have access to a large pan of water to make sure they stay hydrated.





Beginning in late October or early November, the reverse process occurs. They begin to shelter in their burrows at night to protect themselves from the cold. At Critter Creek the winter temperatures are too cold for them in their burrows, so we move them to their winter quarters where they go into semi-hibernation.

If you want to beat the heat, learn from the desert tortoise and dig yourself a burrow. Stay there for 90% of the day! Sounds like a plan.