



**Final Report to the
Alameda County Fish and Game Commission**

***Resolving Negative Human-Wildlife Interactions
(AKA Urban Wildlife Conflicts) in Alameda County - 2021***

December 8, 2021

Original Funding Request and Project Description

International Bird Rescue was awarded a \$10,000 grant from the Alameda County Fish and Game Commission in March 2021. The goal of the grant was to address known, ongoing Urban Wildlife Conflicts (negative human-wildlife interactions) in Alameda County in 2021, and to benefit Alameda wildlife by giving aquatic birds that have been harmed by human impact a second chance at a normal life. The grant's purpose was to offset nutrition, medicine, and basic veterinary care costs for birds admitted from Alameda County to our San Francisco Bay-Delta Wildlife Center between May and September, 2021.

Our San Francisco Bay-Delta Wildlife Center in Cordelia, CA admits more than 2,000 local aquatic birds annually, and releases them back into the wild once they are successfully rehabilitated. Over the past 4 years, we've received an average of 200+ birds annually from Alameda County. As a "referral hospital," we often treat the most challenging cases that are beyond the capacity or skills of other regional wildlife centers and clinics.

Unlike traditional veterinary clinics, our patients come to us with no funding, no insurance, and no one responsible for paying the bill. Birds injured by human impact (as the majority of our cases are) require capable hands and large volumes of food and vitamins in order to be rehabilitated successfully and returned to the environment. Only with philanthropic support from concerned citizens, foundations, corporations, and municipal agencies are we able to meet the demand for our services.

The original grant proposal requesting \$10,000 was to treat and rehabilitate approximately 47 wild avian patients admitted from Alameda after April 1, 2020. Commission funds were to be used to pay for costs of animal nutrition, medicine, and basic medical supplies:

- \$13.38: average cost per bird for one day's worth of animal care, including nutrition, medicine, vitamins, dietary supplements, veterinary supplies (such as vet wrap, sutures, surgical supplies), enclosures, etc.
- 16: average length of days of stay for a bird in care.
- 47 birds supported by an Alameda County Fish and Wildlife Propagation Fund \$10,000 grant in 2020.

Alameda County Fish and Game Commission's \$10,000 grant funds were to be used to pay for animal nutrition, medicine, and basic medical supplies.

Program Results

Grant funds were received in May 2021. In our FY21: 10/1/20-9/30/21, we rescued 207 Alameda County birds. In the grant program period of 4/1/20 through 9/30/20, we admitted 168 Alameda patients for care. This figure is higher than historical averages, and shows that COVID-19 has not diminished human-related impacts on wildlife. Patient data pulled from our RaptorMed software (which we use to track medical information specific to each patient) shows the following for Alameda County patients we received:

- 16 – Egrets – Snowy, Great, Cattle
- 28 – Herons – Green, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Great Blue
- 58 – Ducks – Mallard
- 14 – Geese – Canada
- 3 – Pelicans, American White, Brown
- 20 – Gulls – Western, California, Glaucous-winged
- 11 – Killdeer
- 3 – Grebe, Clarks', Western
- 3 – Snowy Plover
- 2 – Common Murre
- 2 – Least Tern, California
- 2 – Northern Fulmar
- 2 – Sanderling
- 1 – each: Black Oystercatcher, Gadwall, Red-necked Phalarope, Double-crested Cormorant

The average length of stay for these patients was 14.2 days. With an average cost of \$13.38 per bird for one day's worth of animal care (including nutrition, medicine, vitamins, dietary supplements, veterinary supplies (vet wrap, sutures, surgical supplies), enclosures, etc.), the economic impact of Alameda County service we provided between 4/1/21 and 9/30/21 was \$31,500, \$10,000 of which was supported by a 2021 grant from Alameda County Fish and Game Commission.

We were able to efficiently and effectively rescue and rehabilitate so many wild birds because of our well-established response protocols, developed through years of direct, hands-on experience:

1. **Rescue:** Volunteers, citizens, and other rescue agencies transport injured or orphaned birds to our Wildlife Center in Fairfield, CA.
2. **Triage:** Birds undergo a triage assessment by our professional veterinary staff where vital signs are taken, the bird's weight and measurements are recorded, and blood work is often done. A medical treatment plan and a nutrition plan are created specific to each bird.
3. **Medical Intervention:** Typically initiated after the first 24-428 hours in care, so that the initial trauma of capture can abate (remaining mindful that these are wild animals), and we can be assured that the animal has the strength to endure the stress of a medical procedure such as washing or surgery.
4. **Recovery:** Treated birds move to a recovery area, just as a patient would be at a human hospital. Here, their progress is closely monitored until they are ready to move to a rehabilitation area.

5. **Rehabilitation:** Birds heal their wounds and gain strength in our predator-proof aviary enclosures.

6. **Release:** When birds have healed and matured to be capable of survival on their own, they are released back into the wild at species-appropriate locations.

Each rescued bird is given an improved quality of life. Each released bird is an indicator of progress towards our goals of mitigating human impact on the environment and conserving biological diversity. Treated birds are banded so that they can be tracked by scientists, volunteers, and the Federal Bird Banding Lab. Data from the banding effort is analyzed by our veterinary care team as part of ongoing research, and the results shared at professional conferences.

2021: Our 50th Anniversary and A Year of Three Crises

2021 marked our 50th consecutive year of providing immediate, ethical, effective, and humane solutions to the problem of wildlife harmed by human impact. In addition to our core, ongoing wildlife rescue, rehabilitation, and emergency preparedness work, we also responded to three different crisis events in 2020 and 2021:

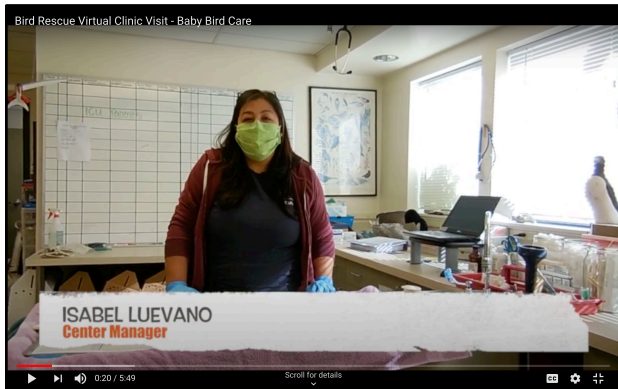
1. COVID-19 Pandemic and the Challenges We Continue to Face

During the COVID-19 pandemic, **our operations and programs were considered "essential services" by the State of California.** We pivoted our work to remain viable with a skeleton crew of essential clinic staff, while the rest of staff worked remotely. Paid staff struggled to meet the demand for our specialized services from the public and from other closed clinics during the COVID-19 pandemic. We were without the help of the hundreds of volunteers we normally rely upon (the equivalent of 15 full time employees) who followed “safer-at-home” State COVID protocols and recommendations. We continue to take appropriate measures to maintain our levels of service and responsiveness, while protecting the safety of our people, and while experiencing dramatically reduced or delayed funding.

Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation continued throughout 2020 and 2021 with little reduction in patient cases, although volunteer support was significantly diminished and practically eliminated. We leaned into our experience as emergency responders to keep our staff safe while still delivering no-cost service to the community and treating wildlife. Since 3/1/20, we lost approximately \$20,000 in earned revenue from cancelled emergency response drills, and over \$100,000 in philanthropic support as donors delayed their decision-making processes, reduced their gifts, or redirected their philanthropy.

Even during this fraught time, we remained true to our mission and vision: inspiring people to act toward balance with the natural world by rescuing waterbirds in crisis, and using our redemptive stories of rescue and rehabilitation to inspire people to take action to protect the natural home of wildlife and ourselves.

In short, we were resourceful, practical, and innovative, just as we have been for 50 years, since our founding in 1971.



Many public programs pivoted online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, Isabel Luevano, Center Manager for our San Francisco Bay-Delta Wildlife Center participates in our Virtual Open House programming.



Providing uninterrupted essential services to the citizens and wildlife during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Long Beach Seabird Rescue

In May 2021, a major nesting site for both near-threatened Elegant Terns and Least Terns at Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve in Southern California was disturbed by human impact (a crashed drone), as reported by the LA Times and the [Press Enterprise](#). Thousands of terns abandoned an estimated 2,000 eggs. There is evidence that the Bolsa Chica Elegant Terns fled to other nesting sites, including two barges located in busy Long Beach Harbor, approximately 500 feet offshore and not accessible by land.



Nesting Elegant Terns on barge located in Long Beach Harbor.

Beginning July 7, 2021, young terns were spotted falling off of the barges, and dead tern chicks were washing ashore. Our partners at Los Cerritos Wetlands Stewards and El Dorado Nature Center were first on the scene and immediately contacted International Bird Rescue.

With our expertise and the hands-on knowledge that comes from working with waterbirds on a daily basis, we immediately activated our response teams. Just a year earlier in 2020, we published



Some of the young Elegant Terns in care at our Los Angeles Wildlife Center.

an important scientific paper on a rescue-and-rehabilitation effort that led to a notable success: the post-release survival and breeding of a group of Caspian Terns in Southern California.

As the crisis unfolded, it became clear that thousands of young birds were at risk. The chicks, still without flight feathers and unable to get back up onto the barge, would have drowned without rescue.

Bird Rescue staff were on the water, each day for weeks, performing search and collection of the chicks and transporting them to our wildlife hospital in San Pedro for care. We worked closely with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Port of Long Beach in ongoing planning operations, and determined practical and immediate solutions to prevent the problem from continuing.

At our Los Angeles Wildlife Center, each young bird was evaluated, dried, and warmed to stabilize its condition. Tern chicks require hand feeding, and can habituate fairly easily and become accustomed to human interaction. This can be unsafe for wild animals, so we took extra precautions to cover our faces and bodies during feeding so these birds would remain wild.

Our clinic staff members are always attentive to the individualized needs of particular species, and work creatively to ensure that the birds receive proper care. Knowing that Elegant Terns have sensitive feet and need a softer natural substrate to prevent foot injuries, staffers were busy early each day collecting sand to line the bottom of the birds' enclosures.

Once fully fledged, the rescued chicks left the barges along with the rest of their colony. They have been spotted as far north as San Francisco, and as far south as San Diego.

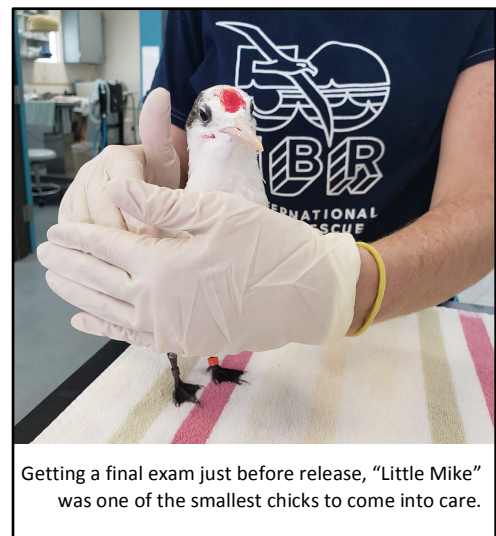
Two key outcomes of our crisis response effort were:

- The rescue of 3,108 near-threatened Elegant Terns (exceeding our early estimate by nearly seven-fold).
- The successful return of 3,003 Elegant Tern chicks back to the wild: a release rate of 96.6%!

The total number of birds affected, as well as the time frame of the crisis, far exceeded our initial expectations, using more human and financial resources than originally anticipated. Another challenge was that 638 of the near-threatened Elegant Tern chicks required rescue more than once. We adapted by designing and installing special "haul-outs:" small custom-built platforms that floated at water-level so that baby birds who fell off of the nesting barges could safely get out of the water until we could rescue them.



Marked with special pink ink, one of the young Elegant Terns in care, ready for release.



Getting a final exam just before release, "Little Mike" was one of the smallest chicks to come into care.

3. Southern California Pipeline Rupture

As we share this report in December 2021, we are winding down our active deployment in response to a pipeline rupture in Southern California that released tens of thousands of gallons of oil into the ocean and onto beaches. [Reuters news](#) reported the story on October 4, 2021. Since then, the spill has been the subject of hundreds of local, national, and international stories, including [KTLA-TV](#).

Responding to wildlife affected by oil spills is what we were born to do. Alongside our partners in the [Oiled Wildlife Care Network \(OWCN\)](#), Bird Rescue had teams in the field engaging in animal search and rescue, as well as teams in the clinic providing cleaning and care to animals affected by the oil spill. The expertise we have learned through 50 years of caring for wild birds, and the best practices we use at our clinics every day of the year, are being put to work to save wildlife. We are committed to provide all requested wildlife assistance to the authorities.

Daily clinic operations do not stop during a spill, and require the financial support of those who share our values to remain sustainable. Staff members and volunteers have stepped up to care for our regular caseload of injured birds – enabling their colleagues to focus on spill-related efforts. We are all working long hours and incurring additional expenses to keep up.

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