



# Impact Report on Recent Activities

**09/30/22**

## **Summary**

International Bird Rescue relies on philanthropic support to deliver essential services to people and to native wildlife harmed by human impacts.

Our mission is to inspire people to act toward balance with the natural world by rescuing waterbirds in crisis. We address known, ongoing Human-Wildlife Conflicts (i.e., negative human-wildlife interactions).

From our base of operations in California, we deploy anywhere in the world. Through 50 years of our daily wildlife rescue and rehabilitation work, and our emergency responses, we have responded to over 250 environmental crises on 6 continents, and given over 160,000 individual, native birds a second chance at normal lives.

This work benefits people and communities by:

- A) Preventing and addressing cruelty to animals.
- B) Protecting sensitive and vulnerable environmental resources.
- C) Providing immediate, practical, humane, ethical, and effective means for people to take action.

It also benefits native wildlife by alleviating the suffering of 3,500 native birds annually, and by giving aquatic birds that have been harmed by human impact a second chance at a normal life.

Our Northern California Wildlife Center in Fairfield, CA serves the San Francisco Bay-Delta region, typically admitting ~ 2,000 local aquatic birds annually. Our Southern California Wildlife Center in San Pedro, CA serves the greater Los Angeles region, typically admitting ~ 1,500 local aquatic birds annually. Both Centers rescue and release birds harmed by human impact back into the wild once successfully rehabilitated. In addition, we operate a crisis response center in Anchorage (serving Alaska as the only federally-permitted oiled bird center in the State), and are active nationally (in the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Northwest) and internationally.

In our last fiscal year (FY22: 10/1/21-9/30/22), we admitted 3,380 wild, native, aquatic birds for care, representing 116 unique species. In 2021, we treated 6,242 wild, native, aquatic birds (more than double our numbers in 2020), representing 117 different species.

Unlike traditional veterinary clinics, our patients come to us with no funding, no insurance, and no one directly responsible for paying the bill. Birds injured by human impact require capable hands and large volumes of food and vitamins to be successfully rehabilitated and returned to the environment. We are able to meet the demand for our services only with philanthropic support from concerned citizens, foundations, corporations, and municipal agencies who share our values.

We are 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 agencies transport injured and orphaned birds to our Centers.
2. **Triage:** Birds first 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 24-48 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.

**Our top 3 accomplishments over the past two years were:**

1. Mitigated human impact on sensitive environmental resources (responded to **7 major crises** and **rescued over 9,600 individual, wild birds**)
2. Conserved biodiversity by rescuing members of **over 100 different species**, some of which are near-threatened (Elegant Terns) or endangered (Snowy Plovers)
3. **Inspired environmental conservation** through 5 core programs:
  - Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation
  - Wildlife Emergency Response and Preparedness
  - Research
  - Special Projects and Innovation
  - Education and Outreach

**Our top 3 challenges over the past two years were:**

1. **Inflation and increased calls for service are taxing our financial resources: resources that were already strained by the pandemic.** There are long-term and ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic we continue to manage. In the early days of the pandemic, we lost nearly 100% of our ~250 regular volunteers, who were not permitted to work due to health and safety requirements. This represented the loss of nearly 15 full-time equivalent personnel. We have now welcomed most of them back, and in FY22 they contributed the equivalent of 12 full-time staff (approximately 80% of pre-pandemic levels).
2. **We have been activated for seven different crisis responses,** in addition to our daily, ongoing research, wildlife rescue, and rehabilitation work. Even when crises are specific to one geography, we are often required to transfer personnel from one location to another. (See below “Recent Crisis Responses” for additional details.)
3. **Many financial donors (both institutional and individual) continue to delay their funding decisions, or decline support, citing pandemic-related or inflation-related uncertainty.** Daily clinic operations do not stop during a spill or emergency incident, and require the financial support of those who share our values to remain sustainable.

**Our top 3 priorities and goals for the coming are:**

1. **Maintaining peak readiness** to respond to the unpredictable but sadly-inevitable environmental crises, such as oil spills, chemical contaminations, or species collapses (e.g., our Summer 2021 rescue operations of over 3,000 near-threatened Elegant Terns in Southern California after their breeding grounds were disturbed by human intrusion, or, our 2022 Brown Pelican Rescue).
2. **Securing sufficient financial support to keep our essential work sustainable.**
3. **Retaining the best, most-qualified personnel.** Our people and their experience are our most valuable asset. Quite simply, skilled, caring, professionally trained people are key to giving birds what they need to heal themselves. Tangible objects like medicine, food, and nutrition are also vital to our work, but it is our people that innovate new solutions to the changing and increasing threats to wildlife.

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## Recent Crises and Responses

### **1. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza**

There is a new deadly threat facing North America's wild birds: a new strain of avian influenza, called **Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)** Eurasian strain H5N1 2.3.4.4.b. This strain is different from other avian influenza strains that have long plagued the poultry industry. This virus has been spreading around the globe for the past decade and finally reached the east coast of North America this past winter. It had been slow to hit the southwestern United States. Unfortunately, July 15, 2022 was the first detection of the strain in California, affecting two Canada Geese and an American White Pelican at [Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge](#).

This HPAI virus strain is not considered to be a high risk to humans, but it is highly-contagious among birds. It can be carried from place to place on human shoes and clothing, even on vehicle tires. Crowded conditions at breeding areas and other areas where wild birds congregate are spots where they are at high risk of this disease spreading and causing [mass mortality](#).

We are encouraging the public to be [educated and aware that HPAI is a serious and deadly bird virus](#). We have added protocols to protect our current clinic patients and to reduce the likelihood of infected birds entering our facilities, including outdoor screening of new birds, staff wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when screening incoming patients for HPAI symptoms, laboratory testing as needed, and reorganizing interior spaces to minimize cross-contamination.

### **2. California Brown Pelican Crisis**

In May 2022, Bird Rescue's Los Angeles Wildlife Center and San Francisco Bay-Delta Wildlife Center were inundated with Brown Pelicans, as van-loads of patients arrived daily from other regional wildlife centers and rescue organizations. With intakes totaling 345 birds, staff and volunteers were hard at work with exams, patient evaluations, and care and feeding of each new arrival.

This was the largest influx of pelicans seen at our Wildlife Centers since 2012, and gearing up for such a large influx of large birds was an enormous challenge. We deployed Northern California staff to Los Angeles to assist with the patient volume; we dramatically increased our supplies of fish; and we reorganized our clinic layouts to provide indoor caging for birds that were not yet healthy enough for the outdoor aviaries.

[KCRW Radio](#) and [FOX11 TV-LA](#) both have excellent reporting on this work.

This crisis reminds us that birds in a changing world face new and challenging environmental obstacles. In this case, we saw symptoms of starvation which point towards a food-scarcity issue. Whatever the cause, the birds were failing to find enough to eat and took extra risks when foraging. That, combined with a new crop of young pelicans having to learn to feed themselves, may explain the influx of patients.

We continue to work with US Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game to attempt to determine the cause(s) of this "crash." Regardless of the reasons, we knew that we needed to respond immediately to provide care to these emaciated, and-sometimes-entangled birds if we were to make a difference in their survival (and we have data that shows our interventions are successful: we released 66% of the pelicans rescued and rehabilitated during this crisis back to their native habitat).

Brown Pelicans have been impacted by large-scale perils in the past and they were added to the endangered species list in 1970 due to exposure to DDT that caused their breeding numbers to plummet. It wasn't until 2009 that they were removed from the list. A couple years later there were similar inundations of Brown Pelican patients at our wildlife centers: <https://www.birdrescue.org/new-update-on-brown-pelican-numbers/>

Since 2009, we have attached special blue leg bands to all released Brown Pelicans to help track them in the wild. One pelican released four years ago and spotted recently, shows that treated seabirds can thrive back in nature. Pelican "N89" was reported feeding its young on Santa Barbara Island. Read more about this story: <https://www.birdrescue.org/blue-banded-brown-pelican-n89-spotted-with-baby/>

In another inspiring success story, after sewing up its pouch tear, Brown Pelican 703 was released in San Pedro, CA with band Z62. A week later it was spotted hundreds of miles north in San Luis Obispo County.

All photos: International Bird Rescue



Bird Rescue staff unload pelicans arriving at the Wildlife Center.



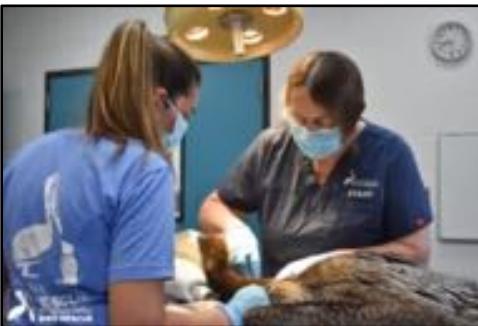
Wildlife Center Manager Kylie Clatterbuck begins intake on a rescued Brown Pelican. When rescuers ran out of large pet-carriers, they were forced to resort to shipping boxes.



Rows of rescued Brown Pelicans who were not yet healthy enough to be in the outdoor aviaries recuperate indoors.



Bird Rescue Wildlife Rehabilitation Technician Kadi Erickson exams one of the 200+ Brown Pelicans in care.



Though most Brown Pelicans admitted were starving and sick, some arrived with wing fractures and fish hook-inflicted wounds. Veterinarian Dr. Rebecca Duerr worked tirelessly to aid these injuries.



A busy afternoon in one of Bird Rescue's outdoor aviaries.

### **3. Medford, OR**

On April 13, 2022 the City of Medford Fire Department (MFD) responded to a reported fire and oil spill



*A gosling washed by Director of Research and Veterinary Science Dr. Becky Duerr and Wildlife Rehabilitation Technician Meagan Hofmeister.*

at the Carson Fuels and Pacific Pride Commercial Fuel Station. According to news reports, up to 12,600 gallons of oil evaporated or flowed into a sensitive natural area: nearby Bear Creek, that leads to the Rogue River. Oil runoff, mostly thick and sticky lubricant, left the fire area through storm drains.

Bird Rescue was activated by our partner Clean Rivers Cooperative, and we worked closely with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, EPA, and Oregon's Department of Environmental Quality.

A team of six was quickly activated on the ground, working to rescue wildlife affected by the spill. The team helped set up a response center in Central Point, Oregon to stabilize, wash and rehabilitate rescued waterbirds.

### **4. Peru**

On January 15, 2022, 500,000 gallons of heavy crude oil was spilled in Ventanilla, Peru, when unusually large waves caused by the volcanic eruption in Tonga disrupted a ship that was unloading at a refinery. The spill stained more than 31 miles of beaches, as well as the nearby guano islands.

Bird Rescue quickly sent Response Team members Julie Skoglund and Mark Russell, where they worked with trusted South American partner, Aiuká. They were joined later by team members Kelly Beffa, Devin Bergeles, Lisbeth Montenegro, Mackenzie Preble, and Susan Kaveggia.



*Mark Russell, Bird Rescue Response Team Member, captures an oiled bird during search and collection efforts in Peru. Photo: Aiuká*

Our team did not need to be reminded that effective international oiled wildlife response calls for both dish soap and diplomacy. In order to effectively meet the needs of wildlife, it is also vitally important to meet the needs of the local community.

“In an international spill, we can’t just swoop in as if we have all the answers,” said Julie Skoglund, who is Bird Rescue’s Director of Operations. “It’s important that we spend time listening, building trust, and building relationships.”

As Bird Rescue seeks to share what we have learned through the decades, one of our primary goals is to build the capacity of local responders and local organizations, and leave them better equipped to deal with future challenges. To this end, our team spent time training others and sharing our protocols, including caging recommendations, husbandry guidelines, and tube-feeding methods with animal caretakers.



Bird Rescue Teams joined Aiuká, and other response members from Peru at the wildlife response near Lima. Photo: Aiuká

"Techniques that work with other species need adjustments when applied to seabirds," Julie said. "I was able to share a few adjustments that will dramatically improve outcomes for birds in care."

While in Peru, our team described an incredibly stark, dramatic landscape with giant beaches and inaccessible rocky shorelines. The work of recovering birds in this environment was challenging and stressful. In the midst of the challenges, a murmuration of Black Skimmers flying overhead provided a brilliant motivator for the work we do. Many of the birds impacted by this spill were migratory birds at the southern end of their migration, and by now will have begun their spring migration northward.

Birds transcend borders. When we respond to birds in need, we must continue to transcend borders as well. Both Bird Rescue and Aiuká are founding members of the Global Oiled Wildlife Response Service (GOWRS), bringing together ten of the world's leading oiled wildlife preparedness and response organizations to develop key readiness guidance for ensuring the best possible outcomes.

## **5. Southern California Pipeline Rupture**

In October and November 2021, we were actively deployed 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. The spill became 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 State of California's 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.

## **6. 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 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.



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

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. Our staff were on the water each day for weeks, performing search and collection, and transporting chicks to our Los Angeles Wildlife Center for care. We worked closely with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and 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 easily habituate and become accustomed to human interaction. This is unsafe for wild animals, so we took extra precautions to cover our faces and bodies during feeding so these birds would remain wild.



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

Our clinic staff 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.



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

## **7. COVID-19 Pandemic**

As the COVID-19 pandemic began in earnest in early 2020, **our operations and programs were deemed "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.

Even now, 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 continues 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 people 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.*

