

# Tracks



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*Cover photo: Don Jedlovec*

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## From the President...

For an urban environment, this county is home to a large number of wildlife. Santa Clara County covers a vast region: from the pale gold hills in the east and south to the redwood trees of the Santa Cruz Mountains and the salt ponds in the southernmost tip of the San Francisco Bay. The Wildlife Center serves about three quarters of the county, totaling almost 1.5 million people and 500 square miles. We do our very best to serve the people and animals in this community. Unfortunately, only a very small percentage of the people who live here are aware of the services we provide, and an even smaller number than that are supporting members.

I would like to change that. Although we see 5,000 animals each year, that is only a tiny fraction of the animals that are injured or orphaned. Most of them don't make it to us because people are not aware of the Center. I have heard repeatedly about people who find out, too late, about the services we offer. They found an injured animal and did their best to care for it themselves, not knowing the specialized care wild animals need. Even sadder, many well-meaning people don't stop to help an animal in distress because they don't know what to do and are unaware there is a place that specializes in rehabilitating wild animals. Our goal is to have every resident of this valley know that we are a resource they can turn to, whether it is help in answering wildlife questions, or as a place to bring an animal in need of help.

I'd like to challenge everyone who reads this message to spread the word about our Center. Let everyone you know hear of our services. Let's ensure that people associate WCSV with wildlife care for this Valley. Another way to help wildlife is to become a member of WCSV. Membership dues provide us with a reliable base of income, and as a member you are kept informed of any events we hold. If you are not a member, please become one today! Fill out and send in the enclosed membership form. If you are already a member, thank you! Can you recruit two more people to join?



*Kathleen Cahill, President*

Finally, perhaps you can play an active role in the Center. We have a great need for volunteers of all kinds. There are many types of skills that can be put into action to help the wildlife. Please see the list below. Thank you for all of the support that you give.

**Education:** Would you like to visit classrooms and clubs, educating both children and adults about wildlife issues? No outside knowledge is required. All training will be provided. Contact Trudi at [tab01@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tab01@sbcglobal.net).

**Fundraising:** Be a part of our team! From organizing events to writing grants, joining our fundraising committee is a great way to help. Contact Kathleen at [khill\\_tchor@mindspring.com](mailto:khill_tchor@mindspring.com).

**Facilities:** Animal enclosures are in constant need of maintenance and repair, and help is always appreciated at maintaining our grounds. Contact Janet at [janet@wcsv.org](mailto:janet@wcsv.org).

**Animal care:** Although we care for animals year-round, our need is highest during spring and summer. You must be 16 years of age to work with animals. Contact Patricia at [patricia.abreu@sbcglobal.net](mailto:patricia.abreu@sbcglobal.net).

# Tracks... ↓ ↓

**Tracks** is the newsletter for the Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley. Submit photos and articles to Janet Alexander at [janet@wcsv.org](mailto:janet@wcsv.org) for consideration.

## Our Mission

To provide high quality care and rehabilitation of injured, sick and orphaned wildlife within the Silicon Valley community. Through educational programs, we foster a positive coexistence between the general public and wildlife and encourage an interest in and concern for wildlife conservation issues.

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*Coyote  
Carmel de Bertaut*



## Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*

*Nestling cowbird being raised with unidentified songbirds*

nests! Instead, the cowbird female just deposits her eggs in the nest of another species when that nest's occupant isn't looking and takes off, hoping for the best.

The cowbird's unconventional reproductive strategy, known technically as brood parasitism, has earned it more enemies than

admirers in recent times. The cowbird is often labeled as lazy or sneaky. These value judgments reflect our cultural and moral values rather than a real understanding of the daily life or natural history of cowbirds. For although their parasitic practices may seem out of place in today's world, it is thought that when the brown-headed cowbird depended on bison for its existence, the ability to forgo building a nest and rearing young allowed these birds the flexibility to follow the bison's migrations. Careful observation shows that from nest selection to the fledging of the young, the process is full of peril. The cowbird females work hard to find other birds' nests that have been recently completed with egg laying just begun, sometimes flying several miles in search of a suitable nest. Females must also contend with aggression from other species that recognize the threat they pose to their nests. Once the egg is laid, some hosts may recognize its characteristic coloration-- cream with brown spots-- and dislodge or build over it. Some scientists estimate that slightly less than a third of cowbird eggs laid result in offspring that successfully leave the nest, a rate not substantially higher than that of the average parasitized host's eggs. One thing seems clear-- the fate of a cowbird egg is far from guaranteed.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of all surrounding brown-headed cowbirds is the question of their role in the decline of other species through their parasitism of songbird nests. Some people claim that the rapid expansion of their range from the Midwest to both coasts following the settlement of this continent by Europeans is one of the leading factors in the decline of songbirds. This accusation has earned cowbirds the ire of

many bird lovers. However, others argue that attempts to blame cowbirds for plummeting songbird numbers just shift our attention away from our own role in the widespread destruction of songbird habitat and undermine efforts to educate people about the importance of land conservation. Both sides agree that fragmentation of large forests and the creation of acres of the type of edge habitat favored by brown-headed cowbirds has critically depleted songbird habitat while increasing that of cowbirds. Interestingly, brown-headed cowbird numbers are no longer rising and in some regions may even be falling, although no one seems to know why this is or what it portends for the future of these birds.

In the end, this much maligned bird is rarely recognized for what it really is-- a survivor from the bygone era of bison, trying as we all are to adapt to a rapidly changing world. Its recent success, just like its uncertain future, have more to do with our alteration of this continent's ecosystem than an intrinsic goodness or evilness. In its favor, brown-headed cowbirds do serve a useful function by eating a large number of pests that plague both livestock and crops. And with all that in mind, take the time to stop and wonder at the unusual path of a cowbird's life next time you see a parent bird trying to feed an offspring twice its size.



# Who Am I?

by Shira Gruhl

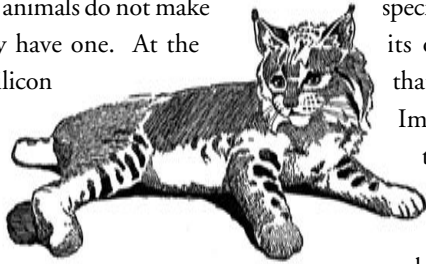
Have you ever wondered how the brown-headed cowbird got its name? Well, the first part is easy: the adult males have a dull, chestnut brown head that contrasts sharply with their otherwise glossy black body. The cow part is a little less obvious-- it comes from their association with livestock, including cattle, which kick up insects that the cowbirds then eat. However, this bird might be more accurately named the brown-headed buffalo bird (which I think is much cooler sounding) as up until the arrival of European settlers in the Midwest and the subsequent disappearance of large herds of bison, these birds are believed to have followed the bison throughout their range.

While the male cowbird is quite distinctive, identifying female and young cowbirds is not so straightforward. The adult female is far less flashy than the male; she is a dull brownish grey overall. Young cowbirds are a mottled brown and closely resemble the young of several other common species. This can lead to a lot of confusion both at the Wildlife Center and when observing birds in the wild. For example, one day at Foothill College I noticed a dark-eyed junco working furiously to stuff enough food into an incessantly begging fledgling much larger than itself. It took several minutes for me to realize that the young bird was both bigger than the parent and a different shape because it was a young cowbird, not a dark-eyed junco at all! "How can that be", you may ask if unfamiliar with the cowbird's secret. The answer: cowbirds don't build their own

# Why Wild Animals Don't Make Good Pets

by Shira Grubl

For many of us, having a pet satisfies a basic desire to love and be loved. But some animals make better pets than others. Cats and dogs, which have been domesticated over thousands of years to live with humans, are a wonderful source of unconditional affection. Wild animals, however, are not. Unfortunately, a lot of people do not realize the reasons that wild animals do not make good pets until they have one. At the Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley we see all too often the disastrous consequences for both the animal and the person involved, as these animals frequently end up in our care. Below are some reasons to avoid keeping wildlife as “pets.”



is just trying to return some dropped change. Wild animals simply do not understand that some people may be trying to help them by providing food and care. The fear and anxiety provoked by their caretakers weakens the immune system of a wild animal.

Keeping a wild animal as a “pet” thwarts its most basic drives— whether it be a social species that craves companionship from its own kind or a solitary predator that hunts and roams over large areas. Imagine being permanently confined to a house, unable to interact with your family, pursue a hobby or watch your favorite TV show. This psychological torture can cause animals to pace or self-mutilate out of boredom. Zookeepers devote an enormous amount of time and energy to keeping their animals stimulated, and even then the animals sometimes develop self-destructive behavior. So unless you think you can do better than the best zookeepers, you are likely to fall short in meeting a wild animal’s needs.

Young wild animals raised alongside humans will imprint on people and never know what they really are. They do not recognize their own species as mates or companions. They also do not learn species-appropriate behavior such as vocalization, submissive posturing and hunting. For this reason, once past a certain stage of development, they will never be releasable back into the wild and typically are unsuitable even for captive breeding. If we cannot find a home for them as an educational animal, they must be euthanized.

## Reasons People Suffer When They Keep Wild Animals as “Pets”

Keeping a wild animal can be very expensive as they require specialized diets. For example, a great horned owl eats ten mice a day, which at an average cost of one dollar per mouse works out to \$3,640 a year. Over a 35 year life span, this adds up to \$127,400— roughly the cost of an Ivy league college education.

Wild animals are destructive. They may chew or claw to pieces furniture or other valued household items. Constructing adequate housing and providing suitable enrichment such as done in a zoo is not cheap either. Just as an idea of cost, the predatory mammal enclosure WCSV built this year cost \$15,000 and wouldn’t have been possible without generous donations from the community.

Finding veterinary care is not easy and the veterinarian may report you to the authorities for possessing wildlife. In addition, wild animals often hide signs of illness until it is very advanced, making any care received likely to be quite expensive.

Finding a pet sitter so you can go out of town for a vacation may be challenging to impossible. Placing an ad can attract attention from animal control or police monitoring for captive wildlife. It looks suspicious to say, “Pet sitter wanted to feed coyote and raven twice daily for two weeks.”

Wild animals can transmit a multitude of diseases to humans, from rabies to brain-eating roundworms. Many of the laws prohibiting possession of wildlife were initially made to protect people from diseases wild animals can carry. Volunteers and employees at WCSV receive training on preventing disease



Great Horned Owl  
Zoe Rain

transmission. For example, people who do home care are instructed not to wash any wild animal's dishes in their kitchen sink or dishwasher; they must have a separate sink installed in their garage or use an outside hose. Unfortunately, people who keep wildlife as "pets" often do not know how to best protect themselves from potential diseases, and so are at a higher risk.

Wild animals are difficult to re-home if you decide you don't want them. Advertising for a new home has all the pitfalls listed above of trying to find a pet sitter. If the animal has been in captivity for more than a short time, it is unlikely that it will survive if released directly back into the wild, although in some cases release is possible after a period of rehabilitation by trained professionals.

Wild animals are dangerous and when they feel threatened are likely to cause harm by biting or scratching. Even a small animal such as a squirrel is capable of fracturing a bone in your finger. A large raptor such as a golden eagle can break the bones in your leg with its powerful feet. An untrained, inexperienced handler of wildlife runs a substantial risk of injury.

Wild animals are unlikely to provide entertainment by exhibiting playful, fun to watch behaviors due to their high levels of stress. In fact, since watching a wild animal



*Bobcat  
Carmel de Bernaut*

increases its anxiety, the more you watch it, the less likely a wild animal is going to exhibit normal behavior

Wild animals have behaviors that are difficult to manage, especially upon reaching sexual maturity. No matter how "cute" they may

look as youngsters, they will turn into adults. Even "cute"-looking adult animals can be a handful—there is a reason "squirrelly" means eccentric and cunningly unforthcoming.

It is illegal to keep native wildlife as pets in California, and you may be prosecuted for doing so.

## Fantastic Fawn Rescue

by Shira Grubl

A picture is worth a thousand words, so when a concerned citizen emailed deer team member Sophie Duckett a photo of a fawn with rope looped around its neck she knew she had to do something. But catching a fawn is not easy. They're fast, and being a prey species they can panic and injure themselves when chased or cornered. It was a task that called for a dart gun, and luckily Sophie knew just the person to call—Dr. Chad Alves, a local veterinarian who volunteers Wednesday mornings at WCSV and helps the deer team with fawn exams.

In the first attempt at darting the fawn the gun misfired because it was low on carbon dioxide. Not easily deterred, Dr. Chad and Sophie returned the next night, this time with a full supply of carbon dioxide. The fawn had been spotted earlier in the evening, but had been scared off by a neighbor's dog. So Sophie and Chad waited. And waited. And waited. (Working with wildlife can require a great deal of patience). Finally, just before dark, the fawn showed up at the bottom of the field. The owner of the property drove Sophie and Dr. Chad within range where he got out of the car and successfully darted the fawn.

Once the fawn was sedated, Sophie and Dr. Chad were able to remove the rope. It was a six to seven foot long piece of yellow luggage tie

with a belt buckle and had been looped around the fawn's neck with a slip knot. It was not only choking the fawn, but also tripping it. As a result, the fawn had both head injuries and wounds on its hoofs.

Dr. Chad treated the fawn's injuries and then Sophie sat with the fawn for an hour and a half while it recovered from the sedation. Before releasing it, Sophie marked the fawn with a red and blue marker so that it could be easily identified in the next few days. When the fawn was released, it disappeared into the bushes with its mother.

The fawn was spotted with its mother by the owners of the property over the next two days. The rescue was a success! But how did the fawn get into such a jam in the first place? Sophie speculates that someone came across the fawn while its mother was away feeding and tied it up with rope. The fawn then escaped, but was unable to free itself from the rope. Sophie cautions people to leave fawns alone, even if they appear to be abandoned by their mothers. It is normal for the mother to leave the fawn



for several hours at a time, and only if a fawn is in the exact same spot for two days in a row should WCSV be contacted.

Special thanks go to Dr. Chad for all his work with the Center. We are also grateful to the entire deer team for the countless hours they spend in the field doing rescues and responding to calls. Without this satellite group of dedicated volunteers, many would not survive. Sophie noted that this particular rescue was unusual because it was "the first time we had the assistance of a veterinarian to do a field rescue. We don't have the capability of doing that without a veterinarian and a gun. Dr. Chad gave up two nights to help this animal. We're very grateful since he's a working vet." Thanks Dr. Chad, the extra medical assistance is much appreciated!



by Carmel de Bertaut

The spring/summer season was a bit lighter than previous years (we don't really have an explanation for why— weather could be a factor) and has just about come to an end.

We admitted the usual cast of characters including American robins, northern mockingbirds and finches to name just a few. Our western scrub jay count was down but we did receive one from Utah! A well-meaning San Jose resident picked it up while on vacation there. Because this jay is from a different sub-species than our local scrub jay we knew we needed to return him to his origin. We promptly contacted wildlife rehabilitators in Salt Lake City and arranged for one to accept him. We then received permission from both California and Utah and from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services in order to transfer the bird back to Utah. This of course took several days and by then the country was baking under a record heat wave. Because of the intense heat, all airlines placed embargos on transporting animals. Therefore, he had to stay here indefinitely while we waited out the heat. Finally, after an eight-week stay, he was boarded on to a plane and flown to Salt Lake City. After a tiresome trip, we are happy to report his safe arrival. He is presently in an enclosure getting acclimated to his new surroundings. He will have to learn the local "jay" dialect from his fellow scrub jays. As soon as he accomplishes this he will be released into the wild.

Of course birds aren't the only animals at the Center. Mammal species we have raised and rehabilitated include foxes, coyotes, and raccoons. Those who haven't already been released should be soon.

Unfortunately we have seen more West Nile patients this year than last, and while we do what we can for every bird that comes in with the disease, they have all died. This is a devastating disease for corvids (crows, jays and magpies). Santa Clara County has the highest number of birds in the State testing positive for the virus this year. But please, if you see a crow or jay needing help, bring it to us— even if we get one recovered bird back out there we will consider it a success.

If an animal survives this disease, it may mean they have a greater inborn ability to fight it off, and will pass this genetic resistance to their young. Eventually, the corvids may develop the ability to co-exist with this virus.



Northern Mockingbird  
Zoe Rain

## Tips for Fall

by Shira Grubl

If you've been reading Tracks for any length of time, you've probably read numerous pleas not to prune trees while birds are nesting. You might even be beginning to wonder, "So when am I supposed to cut back my trees and shrubs?" The answer is fall. Cutting back overgrowth at this time of year has the added advantage of allowing more light to reach your windows, which will in turn help warm your place naturally in the winter. (Conversely, by letting your plants grow uninterrupted over the spring and summer, they provide extra shade that can help keep your house cool.) For more tips on how to minimize your impact on local wildlife and the environment during the cooler, wetter weather that lies ahead, read below.

### Do ...

**Trim your shrubs and trees starting in October.** Don't delay your yard work into winter, as Anna's hummingbirds in Santa Clara Valley may start nesting as early as December!

**Compost yard waste.** By composting, you both minimize the amount of material that enters the waste stream and return your garden's nutrients to the soil without using commercial fertilizers that contribute to toxic run-off. Santa Clara County has free composting workshops and subsidized bin sales. To get more information or to register call 408-918-4640. If you've already been composting, fall is the best time to reap the rewards of your hard work— spread your compost around plants so that the winter rain can carry nutrients into the soil.

**Consider installing a natural gas log set in your fireplace to help reduce pollution from burning wood.** If you choose to switch to using natural gas, you may be eligible for a \$100 or \$300 rebate. To check, go to <http://www.sparetheair.org/changeout.htm> or call 1-800-HELP-AIR. As of this writing there was still funding available for these rebates.



Anna's Hummingbirds  
Don Jedlovec

## Don't ...

**Don't drive over the speed limit.** Speeding increases your chances of hitting wildlife. Many of the larger mammals that are brought to WCSV have been hit by a car or orphaned when their mother was hit by a car. With fall's shorter days, these animals will be harder to see during the morning and evening commutes so pay special attention at these times.

**Don't burn wet wood.** Only burn wood that has been dried for a minimum of six months because dry wood burns more completely and therefore releases less pollutants.

**Don't direct outflow from gutters onto concrete or pavement.** If at all possible, point or extend your gutters so they empty onto unpaved land. By routing rain onto dirt you will help meet your yard's need for water and reduce the amount of storm water that surges into our area's creeks during heavy rain.



## One Way to Leave a Little Behind

*Dan Alexander*

None of us knows what the future holds. It's hard to think about. We do know that our precious wildlife needs to be protected or future generations won't have it to appreciate. Won't you please consider us in your will or trust? Your contribution can be a way to continue giving if you include WCSV in your will or estate plan. You can rest easy knowing that you've made a difference for the local animals!

*by Trudi Burney*



Summer gets us out of the classroom and into the field--the field of summer camps and citywide events. In the past our outreach booth has consisted of the basics. This included a variety of literature and a taxidermy animal or two to draw attention. But thanks to a grant from the Bill Graham Foundation we've been given the funds to super-size our booth components and more effectively share WCSV's message of wildlife rehabilitation and education.

It's taken quite a few months to get the booth just the way we wanted it and now it's ready to be unveiled at our next event. The new set up includes a portable tabletop display, banners explaining the rehabilitation cycle and photographs of spring babies, a collapsible literature rack, laptop speakers for our slide show, a tablecloth, carrying cases and transport dolly. All are designed to set up and break down easily.

As for the design, Adobe Systems, Inc. has always been a good partner for us and the booth would not have been completed without two of their talented employees, who are also volunteers at WCSV. Steve Chen and Karen Tanner both spent uncomplaining hours considering my design concepts and changes. The end result is quite beautiful (see picture) and will truly make a difference in our education efforts. Also thanks go to Mai Torralba, another Adobe employee that put the word out of our need for a designer. Adobe also has an employee match program that converts volunteer hours spent on our non-profit into a cash donation. We are doubly blessed in our relationship with them!

We've got several venues booked in the next few months. The first time we'll use the new booth will be at the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds for the Red Cross Partners for Preparedness event. Following that, September promises to be the busiest month with several district fairs and city celebrations. Looks for us on the weekends while you're out and about. I'll be the one beaming from behind the table as I proudly show off WCSV's work in a new and much improved way.



*Trudi Burney*

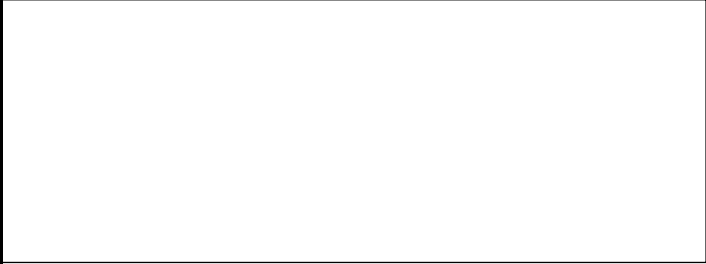


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*American Robin  
 Don Jedlovec*



# HARVEST HOWL



**Wildlife Awareness Day**

**FREE ADMISSION!**

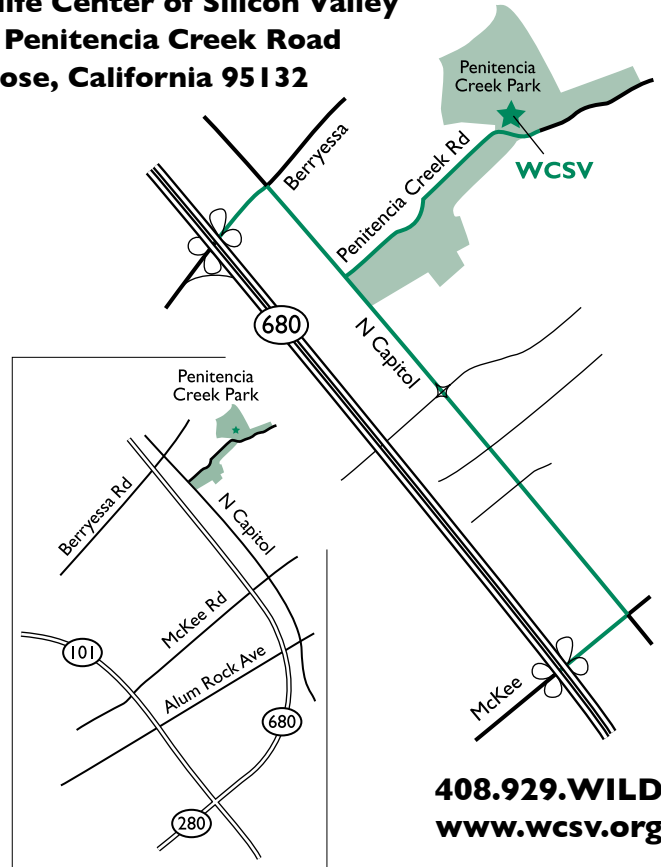
Saturday, October 28  
 12 noon – 4 p.m.

**Learn about our wild neighbors**  
**Educational presentations**  
**Door prizes**

Donations of the following items gladly accepted:  
 Paper towels • Tissues (unscented)  
 Bird seed • Walnuts, peanuts, almonds  
 Feline Maintenance Science Diet

## How to Contact Us

**Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley**  
**3027 Penitencia Creek Road**  
**San Jose, California 95132**



**408.929.WILD**  
**www.wcsv.org**

*this is a leased facility of the Santa Clara County Parks & Recreation Department*