



CUYAMA RIVER INCIDENT

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

OUR MISSION

We are committed to providing the best achievable proactive capture and care to oil-affected wildlife anywhere in California



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OILED WILDLIFE CARE NETWORK ACTIVATED FOR SPILL RESPONSE

On March 21, 2020 the Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN) was activated by the Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) following a tanker truck accident on the Cuyama River in Santa Barbara County. We deployed staff to support response efforts at the spill site, hazing the site and recovering observably oiled wildlife. Field Specialist Jennie Hawkins was part of the response team deployed to the spill site. Here is her account:

FIELD SPECIALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

"Hey, wait...listen". I whispered. "Did you hear that?" Wendy and Danene were on the opposite bank, directly across from me. Dressed in Tyvek, a safety vest, lifejacket, a raincoat and a hard hat on, an N-95 mask and safety glasses covering their face, a spotlight and net in hand, the two of them looked like something out of a cartoon.

They stopped walking and listened. The rain was still coming down, but the birds were just beginning to chatter, and the first rays of sunlight could be seen on the horizon. And then there it was again, that **throaty vocalization**. "What in the world is that?" I asked. "Is that a Red-Legged Frog?" We knew there was a possibility that this threatened species could be in the area and had listened to their calls online, but none of us had ever heard them in the wild before. I turned on my spotlight and scanned the bank near where they were standing. "I don't see any eyeshine, but it sounds like it's coming from behind you guys, up near the trees". I crossed the river and joined Wendy and Danene on the other side. The three of us started heading back toward the newly created dam that had been erected to contain the oil, but also acted as a nice path across the river where we could easily get back to the truck.

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Response specialist Jennie Hawkins recovering oiled wildlife at the Cuyama River spill site.

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We each took a different path through the trees in hopes of catching sight of this odd sounding species. Just before reaching the dam, I shined my flashlight into a little cave in the rock face we were passing. “Guys!” I shouted in excitement “I found something!”. I placed my net over the entrance, shined my light into the cave to make sure there were no other occupants, and then with Wendy’s help, slowly coaxed the Western Toad out of the cave and into the net. Realizing we needed to get going if we were going to make the morning safety tailgate briefing, we placed our new friend in a container we had brought, entered the data into the Wildlife Recovery App, and boogied back to the truck.

This spill response was very different than any others I have been involved with. California was (and still is) under quarantine due to COVID-19, so this spill response was limited as far as staffing numbers to make sure people were kept as safe as possible. In addition, everyone was required to

wear an N-95 mask at all times. No exceptions. There were numerous port-a-potties and hand-washing stations set up at each staging site, including several pink “women only” ones. There were people stationed at the river access points that would wipe down your vehicle door handles for you. Lunch was individually bagged and delivered to reduce the potential for germ spread.

“This spill response was very different than any others I have been involved with.”

–Jennie Hawkins

A six-foot separation was required when working in the field, unless it was absolutely necessary to be in closer contact. All of this made the response slightly more difficult, but the hardest part was with everyone wearing a mask it was a lot harder to hear what they were saying! Despite all the challenges that we were facing during our first COVID-19 spill

response, keeping people safe was always our top priority.

Because we suspected we had red-legged frogs in this specific area, challenges or no challenges, the search was on! With the energy level spiked, onto the riverbank we went, determined to capture any affected wildlife. After much searching, I grabbed onto some old wood debris that was pushed up against the bank. As I did, I heard a plop and saw a frog jump into the water. I scooped it up with my net and, with Wendy’s help, we examined it to see how oiled it was. Based on how much oil was in the water where we captured it, we expected it to be very visibly oiled. However, while it didn’t appear visibly oiled, substantial product came off onto our gloves, so we carefully boxed it up and transported it back to our staging area.

Upon getting it back to our Mobile Animal Stabilization Hospital (MASH), we did a more thorough examination. While its hind legs were more yellow than the tell-tale red that is common,

it turned out to in fact be a red-legged frog (but probably a young one). We provided it food, water, and some rest, and the next day gave it a Dawn® bath, a new home to recover in, and lots of earthworms. It turns out they really like earthworms! We continued to house and feed our threatened patient until it was able to be released back into the wild.

Overall, this response was a great experience for all of us. There were so many nuances (and some significant challenges), but we further refined our response procedures during unique circumstances, continued to develop more inland-specific techniques, and found ways to improve our field data collection tools. In total, we collected 21 animals (9 Western Pond Turtles, 3 Mallards, 1 Belted kingfisher, 1 fish, 4 Baja California Tree Frogs, 1 Western Toad and 2 California Red-legged Frogs) and successfully released almost 90% of the live ones collected. It just goes to show that pre-planning, adaptability, resilience in the face of uncertainty, and having and working with a great team leads to great success! ■



OILED



WASHED

COVID-19: SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

Written by **Danene Birtell**, Readiness Coordinator: Care Operations (OWCN)

As OWCN emergency responders we are typically very focused on planning for the next spill, or responding when an incident occurs. That being said, we had an opportunity to shift our focus and hear from colleagues at the UC Davis One Health Institute (OHI) who are assisting our country collaborators with the USAID-funded PREDICT project in response to the recent coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Here are key takeaways from that meeting which we hope can be helpful for our fellow oiled

wildlife responders during these unprecedented times:

1. Be proactive and prepared, not paranoid
2. Currently the best prevention is good personal hygiene and maintaining a reasonable social distance from others (at least 6 feet)
3. If you feel unwell, stay home!
4. In most people the symptoms are mild and similar to the common cold, such as fever
5. Cover your mouth and nose with your elbow or a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Remember to dispose of your tissue in a closed receptacle
6. Plan ahead to keep items in your home that would be helpful if you become ill

Learn more [here](#).



Our field teams recovered a total of 18 live and 3 dead oiled animals related to the Cuyama River Incident. Live animals were washed and rehabilitated prior to release in suitable habitat a safe distance upstream of the spill location. Species recovered (some not pictured): Belted Kingfisher, Mallard Duck, Western Pond Turtle, California Red-Legged Frog (federally threatened), Western Toad, Baja California Tree Frog.

WILDLIFE DISASTER NETWORK

Written by **Scott Buhl**, Readiness Coordinator: Field Operations (OWCN)



(Clockwise from top-left): Lorraine Barbosa treating the pad of a black bear, Duane Tom cleaning the paw of a bear cub, tilapia skin bandage applied to black bear cub's left hind paw, Duane Tom assisting with wildlife reconnaissance efforts.

These past few months have been a whirlwind in many ways, but especially in terms of a record shattering wildfire season here in California. Unfortunately, we have seen five of the top six largest wildfires consume our landscapes this year alone. The aftermath has included loss of life, destruction of property, charred terrain and the unsettling recognition that our annual wildfire seasons are getting worse.

While the reality may feel grim at times, I find encouragement in the hope inspiring moments that surprise us amidst the chaos. Often it is human

kindness in the form of shelters, donations, and lending a helping hand to those who have become climate refugees. But another shining light has emerged this year in the form of a new program developed to directly assist wildlife affected by natural disasters, the Wildlife Disaster Network.

The concept of mobilizing existing wildlife organizations to aid one another and wildlife during disasters has come up in the past, including during our 2018 OWCN Planning Summit where a Mutual Aid Working Group was formed to brainstorm

effective mutual aid strategies amongst our OWCN Member Organizations. But more recently, efforts were further organized through the hard work of Dr. Jamie Peyton (UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine), Dr. Michael Ziccardi (UC Davis Wildlife Health Center), CDFW Office of Spill Prevention and Response, and the CDFW Wildlife Investigations Lab. Plus an amazing amount of support from Gold Country Wildlife Rescue, who along with CDFW WIL, has hosted the care of many of the patients.

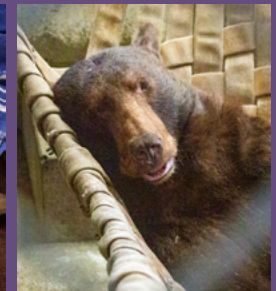
“Through OWCN, we’ve seen how effective a mobilized and coordinated response can be to help aid wildlife, and I’m excited to see how the Wildlife Disaster Network can bring that same level of care to wildlife affected by wildfire.”

—Michael Ziccardi, Director (OWCN)

WILD PATIENTS

The WDN's first patients include coyotes, bobcats, bears, foxes, and mountain lions. Photos of our patients: black bear cub, grey fox, black bear, and mountain lion.

Photo credits: Jamie Peyton (UCD) and CDFW



WDN veterinary medical team (left-right): Eric Johnson, Jamie Peyton, Duane Tom, and Lorraine Barbosa.

Upon receiving approval to respond to a few of the recent fires, our very own OWCN veterinarians, Dr. Lorraine Barbosa and Dr. Duane Tom, have been able to provide some direct assistance to this

program. They have been utilized in both clinic roles caring for patients with foot pad burns, as well as out in the field providing reconnaissance in search of any additional affected wildlife.

Even though the program is in its early stages, the work has been very exciting and impactful. The hope is as the program expands, additional partners will join the efforts, and there may even be volunteer opportunities in the future.

Lastly, we want to send a huge Thank You to all the California wildlife rehabilitation groups who have received and assisted in transferring wildfire patients to care. And last but not least, a definitive shout out to UC Davis Veterinary Emergency Response Team (VERT, and their student chapter, sVERT), who have long been providing emergency response during wildfires, but with a specific focus on domestic animals and livestock aid.

For more information click [here](#).

TECHSPLORATION!

Written by **Sam Christie**, Care Specialist (OWCN)

With so many advancements in modern technology, we are moving into an exciting and overwhelming territory. Utilizing new technologies such as the Wildlife Recovery iPhone App, QR code scanners, the Better Impact volunteer management database, and OWRMD has vastly expanded our capabilities. But are there additional technologies that we can take advantage of to make us more successful in our mission?

Learn more [here](#).



OUR NEW SENIOR MANAGER OF CARE OPERATIONS IS...

Written by **Michael Ziccardi**, Director (OWCN)

Lorraine joined the OWCN in May 2018 as our Facility Veterinarian. As we reported previously, she first entered the wildlife field as a research assistant at the Long Marine Lab while completing a bachelor's degree in marine biology at UC Santa Cruz, then obtained her veterinary degree and a Master's of Preventive Veterinary Medicine at UC Davis. She completed both a small animal internship at PetCare and a marine mammal medicine and pathology internship at The Marine Mammal Center. As a veterinarian at California Wildlife Center, she provided clinical,

surgical, and rehabilitative care for a variety of avian, terrestrial, and marine mammal species, and has enjoyed collaborating on several marine mammal field research projects in Central and South America. In 2017, she became certified as a Diplomate of the American College of Preventive Veterinary Medicine.

We look forward to her enthusiasm and cheerful dedication to wildlife in her new role!

Read more [here](#).



THE MAN...THE MYTH...THE LEGEND

Written by **Michael Ziccardi**, Director (OWCN)

The OWCN has been blessed to have Curt as part of our history since the beginning – first as part of a Member Organization, later as a core component of our Management Team – and celebrated his retirement at the end of October with mixed emotions. To honor him, I thought I would delve a bit into our history, or at least my recollection of it, to give thoughts as to the important role Curt has played in making what the OWCN is today.

I first met Curt in the late 90s during a very busy time with spills in California. In fact, it was so busy I cannot recall which spill it was – Cape Mohican in SF, or Ballona Creek (Long Beach), Santa Cruz Mystery Spill, or the first Pt. Reyes tarball event. What I can definitely recall was how we collectively responded at that point; immediately racing to the scene with little beyond our own personal gear and linking up on scene with International Bird Rescue Research Center (IBRRC) and OSPR staff.

As the OWCN matured, key IBRRC staff continued to play key roles, with Flo, Dee, and Curt playing critical roles for the OWCN during training activities and the construction of our LA and SF Bay facilities. Even at that time, Curt was never satisfied with the “standard” way to provide training content, continually tweaking his methods of conveying information (including timeless stop-motion animation videos using children's toys), exploring new info from sources throughout the world, and pushing trainers to be as good as they can be.

After the Cosco Busan oil spill in 2007, the OWCN was officially given the mandate to lead capture activities during spills in California. One of the first things we needed to do was to formally create bird capture protocols to begin to train new recovery personnel specifically for those roles. Curt was the first and only person we considered to help develop this key document for us due to his experience, knowledge, and interest in the topic, and this became a key part of the evolving readiness program for Field Operations.

Similarly, when a further expansion of the OWCN occurred in 2014-2015 due to inland expansion and the concept of separate Care and Field streams was envisioned, I was shocked when Curt expressed interest in the Care position. That initial inquiry was possibly one of the greatest compliments I can recall regarding the value of what we had created to date in the OWCN; the fact that Curt, an internationally-known expert in oiled wildlife response, was willing to relocate from Astoria, Oregon (a place he truly loves) to Davis to be part of our program was a true testament to his willingness to “put his money where his mouth was” to help take an excellent program and make it even more so.

From Day 1 at UC Davis, Curt pushed the envelope. He pushed himself and others to question WHY we did things and HOW we could do them better. He and Kyra completely re-imagined the training program to provide better



tailored information at each of the different responder levels (and for those of you fortunate enough to take the Oiled Wildlife Specialist training on Cleaning, you know the depths of detail he embraced). He also took the lead role in championing and creating the concept of a field-based facility centered around Western Shelter structures and ancillary support trailers; lessons he learned well from other regions in which he worked. He was tireless in the pursuit of finding new potential members of the OWCN that could add to inland care preparedness. Last, he was a fierce advocate of integration of technology whenever possible to spill response activities, capturing the fine details of animal care that may have been previously not recorded or noted.

Curt is truly deserved of his official retirement from the OWCN after his active involvement since its inception – particularly after the last 5 years of focused efforts on Care activities. However, for those of you who know Curt, we also know he won't be resting on a beach somewhere sunny but exploring new volunteer opportunities focused on his devotion to seabirds. He also has agreed to remain on the OWCN response team should we need him!





GET IN TOUCH

PHONE

(530) 752-4167

EMAIL

owcn@ucdavis.edu

MAILING ADDRESS

Oiled Wildlife Care Network
Karen C. Drayer Wildlife Health Center
School of Veterinary Medicine
University of California, Davis
1089 Veterinary Medicine Drive
Davis, CA 95616 USA

UPCOMING VIRTUAL EVENTS

DECEMBER 3 OWCN Town Hall: Research



www.owcn.org

