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.

Continued on next page
In addition, everyone was required to as staffing numbers to make sure spill response was limited as far quarantine due to COVID-19, so this with. California was (and still is) under 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 bowed 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!
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 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.

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].

“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)
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. Are there additional technologies that we can take advantage of to make us more successful in our mission? Learn 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 in the life of the OWCN. In fact, it was so busy I cannot recall which spill it was — Cape Mohican in SF, or Baloma 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 lining 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 in 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.

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 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 Lyra 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 depth 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.

As the OWCN matured, key IBRRC staff continued to play key roles in 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.

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. 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.

**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 in marine biology at UC Santa Cruz, then obtained her veterinary degree in marine biology at UC Santa Cruz, then obtained her veterinary degree in marine biology at UC Santa Cruz, then obtained her veterinary degree in marine biology at UC Santa Cruz, then obtained her veterinary degree in marine biology at UC Santa Cruz, then obtained her veterinary degree in marine biology at UC Santa Cruz 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.

**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. Are there additional technologies that we can take advantage of to make us more successful in our mission? Learn more here.
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