

Ship Report Transcript

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

By Joanne Rideout

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It's time for the Ship Report the show about all things maritime. I'm Joanne Rideout. It's Tuesday, June 11th, 2024.

Well, today we'll hear the first part of a two part interview I did about the aftermath of a distressing situation that started showing up on local area beaches near the end of May: balls of tar and evidence of an oil spill. The spill, which had no obvious cause, revealed itself also in a number of oil soaked birds that were found on beaches and in other places near the ocean. Birds in serious trouble that were in need of expert help.

That's when staff and volunteers at an amazing local wildlife rehabilitation group here in Oregon stepped in to help. They do a lot of their work behind the scenes, but you may have heard of them. The wildlife center of the north coast, when I heard that Oregon birds were in their care with regard to this spill, I felt relieved. But I also knew that this was a dire situation for these birds. I was able to talk with a staffer at the center about what they're seeing and how the oil is affecting the birds.

I first reported to you about this on May 24th, detailing what was known then about the spill, which was not much. I haven't been able to find any information since then about a cause for the spill which affected beaches locally here in Oregon and also on the Long Beach Peninsula. Today, we'll hear from the rehabilitation coordinator for the Wildlife Center for the North Coast. You'll soon learn that cleaning an oil soaked bird and getting it back out into the world is a lot more complicated than, say, washing your dog.

Let's hear part one of my interview recorded last week.

GN: My name is Ginger Nealon and I am the rehabilitation coordinator at the Wildlife Center of the North Coast.

JR : So tell us a little bit about the center itself. How long has it been around?

GN: Quite some time. We have been there for over 25 years and we are a wildlife rehabilitation facility as well as an educational facility. So we have three ambassador birds that call me our star. Our double crested cormorant is somebody that you can come and visit and meet up close and you can also schedule a private tour as well. We care for anywhere from 500 to 1000 rehab patients annually. Where are you located? We're in Olney, so pretty close to the Big O Saloon, so it's a little bit tucked away from town. Okay, great. How do animals come to you? So generally we just get calls from the public. You know, a lot of times they're from. From town. A bird has hit somebody's window, you know, a little songbird or something, or, you know, in the fall, we get a lot of owls hit by cars that people stop and see, too. And then in the summer, it's a lot of beach and it's a lot of animals. Mostly birds are found on the beach, just, you know, they're just kind of stranded. They've lost their waterproofing and they can't swim anymore or they're emaciated or something like that, or they're just orphaned, which is what we're dealing with right now. This is a we're right in the middle of duckling season. So we've got a lot of orphaned and abandoned ducklings.

JR: And so it sounds like it's mostly birds, but there are other creatures in the mix, too. What other what other kinds of animals do you treat there?

GN: Often we do get some mammals every year. We do get a couple of beavers in once in a while, and then often we will get very young squirrels and chipmunks in the in the summer season that just need a little bit more more rearing before they're ready to go.

JR: When I first contacted you, I was interested in some oil soaked birds that you've been dealing with recently. So how how did your organization first hear about that and when did that start happening?

GN: Yeah, so on Sunday the 19th we admitted to oiled common murrelets. One came from Cannon Beach and one came from Manzanita. We didn't realize they were oiled until they had come into the rehab center. So that's what we realized, that they were actually contaminated with some sort of oil product. So we reported them to the Coast Guard and DFW, as well as U.S. Fish and Wildlife.

JR: Now, when you get a bird in that isn't just in that kind of condition, how do you go about cleaning that off a bird? How how do you how do you clean a bird of oil?

GN: Yeah. So we first have to stabilize the patient to make sure it's healthy enough to survive a very stressful washing process. So several of these birds have come in emaciated, which means they've been in a prolonged period of malnutrition or starvation. So they're generally going to require heat support, fluids and then nutritional tubing of fish slurry or powdered diet to kind of get their metabolism going again until they're they're able to eat on their own. And so it can take, you know, a week or more to get to that point. They're generally going to be ready for a wash once they're in normal body weight and temperature. And they have good blood values and they're alert and oriented as far as the wash process goes. Sometimes we need to do a little bit of testing to make sure that we know how to remove the contaminants. So we'll pull a few feathers, pull a few of the oil feathers out and test them with soap or other pre treating agents to see how easily it comes off. For the bird, we we just washed a bird last Saturday and we had to do a pre-treatment with warmed up canola oil to actually get the contaminants off. And so we treat just before the wash process and then the wash process itself. We use several bins of warm soapy water to clean the contaminants off of the feathers and we try to get as much as possible off in the first couple of bins. We're working the detergent up into the feathers all the way to the skin to make sure all the contaminants are removed. And then we raise the feathers really well until there's no more soap on them. And then after that, the bird is placed in a cage with a high powered, warm, warm air pet dryer to make sure they can stay warm. So that'll stimulate them to preen and the preening is really important because when they're preening, they're they're realigning all their feathers to interlock at the microscopic level, which helps trap warm air against the skin. And it keeps water out. And that's how they repair their waterproofing so it can be buoyant and stay warm in the water again.

JR: And that was Ginger Nealon, wildlife rehabilitation coordinator for the Wildlife Center of the North Coast, based in Olney, Oregon. Tomorrow, we'll hear more from Ginger about the prognosis for birds to recover from this kind of trauma and more about their work at the center and how you can support what they do.

A quick final note about the Rose Festival fleet. They passed by Astoria yesterday on a glorious afternoon. Such a beautiful day. The Canadian ships went on their way out of the river and across the bar. The USS Montgomery, a U.S. Navy ship, is now at the Port of Astoria. And there were a lot of interesting things going on on the waterfront yesterday. Maybe around four or 5:00, the USS

Montgomery was docking at the Port of Astoria with the help of a couple of tugboats. There was a pilot boat on the water and then the Canadian Navy vessels passed by Astoria and under the Astoria make the bridge. And I was out there on the waterfront taking pictures and little videos. And so I just really enjoyed being out there. It was so much fun. And so I posted all that on the ship Reports Facebook page, if you'd like to take a look. It was just a glorious day. Kind of windy as usual. You can hear that in the videos, but that's where we live. So I just wanted to share that with you. And if you want to take a peek, the USS Montgomery, she is at the Port of Astoria. Not sure for how long, but she should be there for a bit on Tuesday anyway.

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