

# Safeguarding Creatures at the Mercy of Humanity, Native Animal Rescue Protects the Liberty of the Wild

by Carolyn Swift

**L**ori Moak-Kean survived well in the corporate world, achieving a manner of steadfast determination in the teeth of the daily commutes and 80-hour work week.

Now she moves just as confidently through the tiny examining room of the Native Animal Rescue (NAR), using every ounce of her mastery in business, marketing and education to grant the wild life of Santa Cruz County a better chance at staying alive.

Moak-Kean left her job selling health care systems about three years ago and has taken charge as NAR's executive director. Now the rewards are different. The pay is only a fraction of what it had been. The job extends up to 24-hours a day, every day, because wild creatures fail to grasp the 9-to-5 schedule, weekends, or holidays.

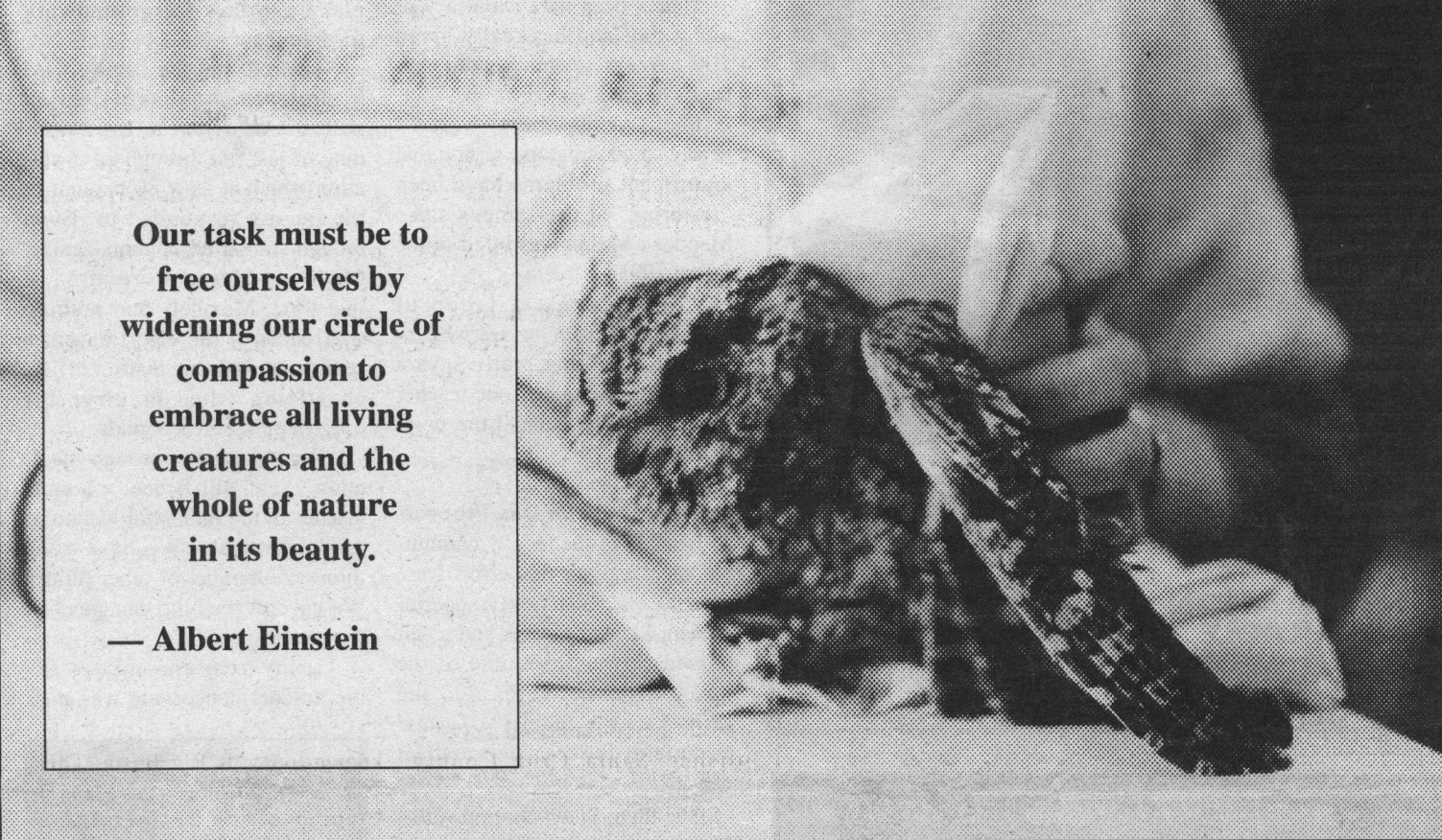
"You know, it's worth it," she said. "I can't imagine going back to corporate America. It is such an honor to hold a red tail hawk, or to tube a baby hummingbird every 15 minutes."

She's completely serious. The challenge in nature is greater than what she encountered in business. Her intent now is to mend the injury suffered by creatures in the way of a whole civilization in the fast lane.

"What we do is stabilize and triage here, then we get them out to foster homes," she explains. "We have foster parents all over the county who are trained to take care of specific breeds."

She's giving an interview in a room full of people, some of them readying for an examination of a western screech owl.

"In a few weeks we'll be doing maybe 40 intakes a day on baby birds and mammals," she said, noting that this was a slow day, and chaos is normal. "Usually by the end of March, we've had 24-36 baby opossums in. We've had 16 already. Some will require 24-hour care for a number of weeks. A volunteer will feed them every two hours. Using a



**Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.**  
**— Albert Einstein**

tiny tube, they will measure the stomach capacity."

Two volunteers come in who will observe and assist staff with the owl's initial exam. The interview momentarily stops.

"The challenge here is multi-tasking," said Moak-Kean, turning toward the examining table. "It's important to prioritize. Right now, we have a bird of prey and it is vital to assess its injuries."

"We've got to get blood, and see if there's an infection," the director tells her crew. She's using this exam as a chance to teach the newer volunteers. She reminds them how it is essential to use gloves when dealing with birds like a raptor.

"If there's any chance of attack," she adds. "You'd better know in advance what you're going to do."

It's also crucial to keep the eyes of the animal covered.

"Some animals, like brush bunnies and deer, see humans as a predator," she continued. "We can literally scare them to death."

Dealing with the stress of the creature is critical to saving its life. The owl is held on the table.

They pull bits of material from its throat and study them. It's parasites, gape worms. The owl is in bad shape.

Just at that moment, a woman enters who has rescued a black bird. A volunteer stands up to do the intake. There are 10 people in the room, and it's warm. A fan hums quietly in the corner. Out in the corridor, dogs in the SPCA kennel bark in a drama of their own.

"So the wing is okay...the left leg and the talons look good," Moak-Kean continues.

The phone rings. Someone is worried that a pond in his neighborhood is going to be drained and the wildlife destroyed. The director takes the phone and commiserates. Then, she supplies the names and phone numbers of agents who help with the crisis.

"Sometimes it's hard to give full attention to callers when there are a lot of other things going on," she comments, turning attention back to the owl. The bird's blood pressure drops.

"I'm afraid we're going to lose him," she said with a matter of factness that apparently comes with experience.

### NAR By the Numbers

Last year, NAR took 11,000 calls on its wildlife hot line. More than 2,300 wild creatures were logged into its files, including 1,760 birds of 120 species. More than 500 mammals of 32 species were treated. Eleven reptiles included three endangered western pond turtles.

Atypically, NAR records its wildlife intakes immediately, unlike those who improve their survival rates by waiting through the first crucial hours. Even so, the Santa Cruz rehabilitation center was able to save and release 44.5 percent. Their rate is impressively higher than the national release average of 38 percent.

"NAR's goal is to help the wildlife native to our area, reducing the effects of both humans and introduced species," said the director. "By rehabilitating native wildlife and releasing them back into the wild, NAR helps to maintain the population diversity of our local ecosystem. While we may not be having a significant effect on the population diversity of gulls, we are most certainly

having a great effect on the population and genetic diversity of animals such as the endangered Brown Pelican and marbled murrelet and many of the increasingly rare songbirds and pelagic birds."

By helping to maintain these animals' populations, NAR further assures the likelihood of the species' long term survival.

"At NAR, we are attempting to act, in our own way, as stewards of our local wildlife and ecosystems in which they live," she added. "We hope that by affecting our local environment in a positive way we will also affect the world environment for the better."

### The Way It Was

Native Animal Rescue was founded 14 years ago. Lisa Leask and several others found a great blue heron on the beach and tried to save its life. They failed, but the experience compelled them to think about Santa Cruz County and the need to take care of its wildlife.

NAR was founded to rescue,

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**NAR** —  
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treat and rehabilitate sick, injured and orphaned wildlife. The eventual goal is to release it back into the natural habitat. NAR also teaches community awareness of native animals and their need for preservation.

NAR is supported entirely by its membership dues and donations from the public. It receives no money from the city, county or

state. Marketing talents of the director and staff are crucial to the organization's own survival.

"The SPCA has been loaning us space now for 14 years," said Moak-Kean. "It is very supportive of what we do. One of their officers was here with me last spring when a doe was hit by a car. We actually gave birth to the fawn right here and stitched her up on the floor. His girl friend sat here with us, picking the ticks off our arms, because deer are always covered with them. It was about

two in the morning, and he was off work — he'd already done his full shift.

"That's the kind of dedication the animal control officers have [here]," she said.

Although the SPCA and NAR are separate organizations, the NAR director has strengthened ties between them in the last few years. Moak-Kean had been on the SPCA Board of Directors and was in charge of its Hug-A-Pet Therapy Program. She was the SPCA liaison to NAR when it became apparent a few years ago that help was needed.

"We've been real lucky in the last two-and-a-half years that we've been able to turn this place around," she said.

NAR reports to two agencies, the Fish and Wildlife Service under the U.S. Department of Interior and the California Department of Fish and Game. The Fish and Wildlife Service gives NAR a permit to handle all federal and migratory birds that come under federal act.

"We are the only federally and state mandated, certified wildlife rehabilitation organization in the county," she noted.

Moak-Kean has high praise for the agents that work with NAR, Ken McCloud, federal enforcement officer with Fish and Wildlife Service, and Capt. Tom Belt of the California Department of Fish and Game.

## Returning Home

Moak-Kean defined NAR's system of returning wildlife to its natural habitat as a science. The crucial point under consideration is food and water, the right amount and the proper diet for that species. As often as possible, they try to return the animal to the exact place where they were found. Doing so means they are sometimes able to return to a nest or mate. Others may be killed if

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they are outside their own territory. Each creature has its own set of requirements.

"Hacking out," is the process of keeping an animal in an outdoor, predator-proof cage for a period of time before its release, allowing it to get accustomed to new surroundings. The exception to this practice is cottontail rabbits, who would get too stressed outdoors. They are acclimated by being placed next to

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## NAR

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an open window for a week or so before their release.

When the time comes for an animal to return to its habitat, NAR always tries to have some-

one strange to the creature perform the release. Sometimes, in spite of all efforts, the cared-for animal has bonded with a human and is reluctant to leave. They "snap wild" sooner when someone else lets them go. "Acting wild" is desir-

able; those reluctant to leave their cages are usually given more time to mature.

The place, the weather, the time of day — all these considerations play into the schedule of when animals are set free. Prior to release,

the NAR staff and foster parents make sure the animal is at least 6-8 weeks old, is self-feeding for at least two weeks, and prefers its natural foods. They make sure they are familiar with their surroundings, and properly shy of dogs, cats and

humans. They also try to ensure the creature will enjoy at least three days of good weather once it's free.

"At NAR, we believe a truly successful rehabilitation means the animal survives after its release," she said. □

**A**ccomplishing what Native Animal Rescue's people achieve requires a motivated team, and NAR has one. Assisting Moak-Kean are Mieko Aoki, Malanie Dominguez and Fastenau. Jamie France is in charge of the monthly volunteer orientation.

The volunteer name tags on the bulletin board number in the dozens. Trainings are extensive. One recently attended by the NAR staff and volunteers was the "Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response Training," at PG&E in Moss Landing, a two-day training required by state and federal governments before performing oiled wildlife rescue. More than 40 NAR participants were included in the classes held last spring and summer.

NAR's hard-working Board of Directors is headed by Gayle Ortiz, president; assisted by Dennis Lippitt, vice-president; Lana Pieri, secretary; and Pamela Frazier, treasurer.

#### Gifts from Veterinarians and Hospitals

Even with trained volunteers and an energetic board of directors, NAR has been able to get its job done only with the help of veterinarians throughout the

region who donate their services — many of them on an on-call, 24-hour basis.

"We have about 14 veterinarians in town that donate their services," said Director Lori Moak-Kean. "Some will even hold off their clients when they get a call. They're extremely dedicated."

Vital help has also come from Dominican Hospital, where hospital workers have supplied equipment and hundreds of dollars of medicine over the years.

"The hospital has been phenomenal," she added.

The director spends a good part of her time appealing for donations, since the need is never ending — for caging, kennels, food, heating pads, soap, towels, and sheets. Paradoxically, NAR can't even use some of what it's been given, simply because it lacks the space. A volunteer finally donated a garage that's now "chock-a-block full" with a washer and dryer, refrigerators, an anesthesia machine and other surgical equipment that's desperately needed but can't be set up because there's no room at NAR's offices.

As thankful as the organization is to be sheltered by the SPCA, Moak-Kean said their ideal home would be someplace within the city limits of Santa Cruz or in the Live Oak area, with good public access. They need about 1,000 square feet, plus another half-acre for caging. They also need cages suitable for coyotes and bobcats.

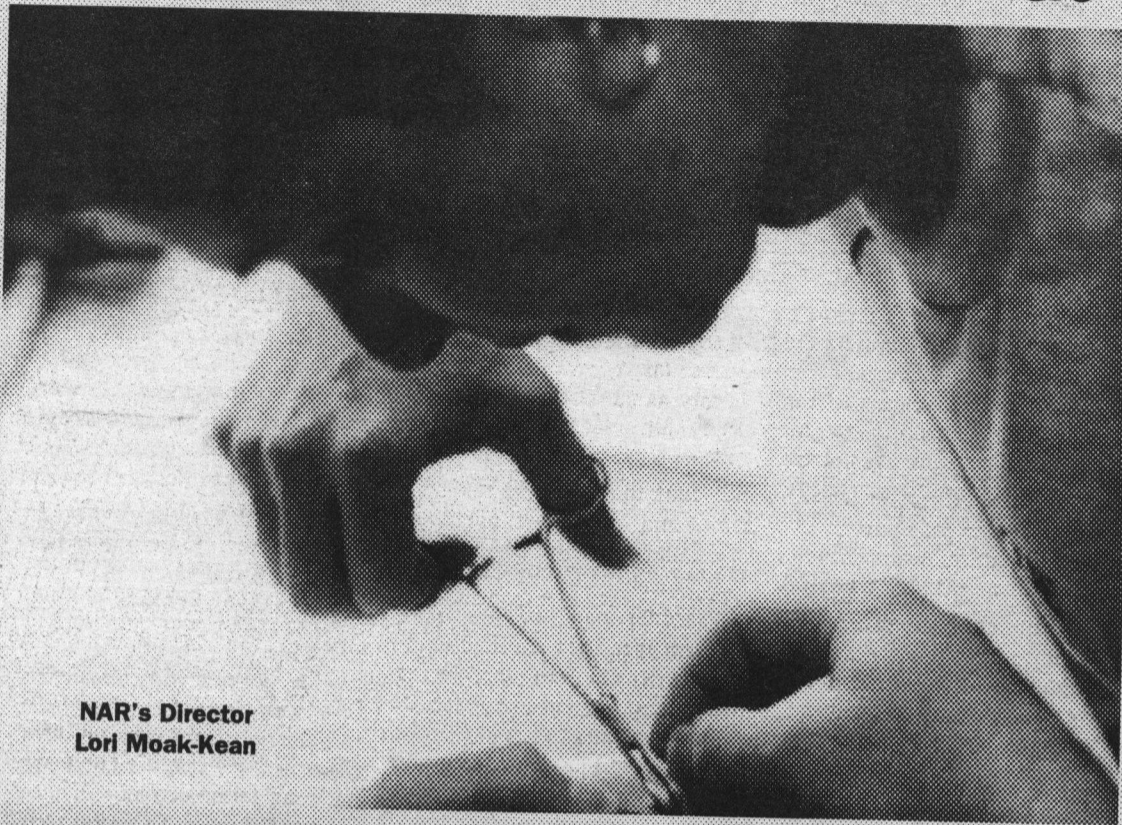
"Right now all we can do is triage them and send them to other facilities that can handle them," she noted. "And that's not fair to the animal because it's so

stressful."

She talked about the times 50 pelicans have been in their tiny pool. "And you can't imagine how disgusting that is," she smiled. They can use more pools.

The NAR director drew apart the hawk's small cage. It opened its mouth and spread its wings in

## Teamwork & Lots of Friends



NAR's Director  
Lori Moak-Kean

a defensive posture.

"When you think about this county, that this is all we have for wildlife rehabilitation, it's really kind of depressing. I feel we owe it to them to give them something a little more. We have such a wonderful community here, we are the Monterey Bay Sanctuary — and yet this is all there is for the wildlife of this county. ... What's the word to describe this?" she glanced down the short line of cages, "Lilliputian."

Although the task at times seems overwhelming — as it does when there's an oil spill on Thanksgiving morning or when a pelican arrives with a gunshot wound on New Year's Day — the NAR workers have thrown their might toward wildlife preservation. Much of what they do is an attempt to counteract the damage of human activity. They know they are saving not the weakest animals but those that have so far been strong enough to adapt to urbanization and the impact people have made on the natural world.

Being an educator, NAR's leader supplied a few quotes about why people should care about injury to animals. This one is from Dr. Albert Schweitzer: "The thinking man must oppose all cruel customs no matter how deeply rooted in tradition or surrounded by a halo... We need a boundless ethic which will include the animals also." □