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Wing and *Animal Shelters* a prayer can't save rescuers

Native Animal Rescue needs own quarters, more money

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SANTA CRUZ — The last of the birds have been moved out and a phone message tells callers where to take sick or injured wildlife.

But a day after the Native Animal Rescue offices closed, efforts were under way Monday to revive the operation that has saved thousands of animals over the past 15 years.

The only state and federally licensed wildlife rehabilitation operation in the county closed its doors after an unprecedented number of dying seabirds from Monterey Bay last month overwhelmed the clinic.

Directors said the \$50,000 budget was a fraction of what is needed, and the tiny room used for the wildlife alongside the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals facility was too stressful for them and the wild animals.

Following the marine epidemic, executive director Lori Moak-Kean resigned and board president Gayle Ortiz — with agreement from the board — decided to close the facility. "They had just been

keeping it together for so long," Ortiz said. "They finally just hit the wall."

She said Monday that after news of the closing, several would-be donors had offered up to \$10,000 to keep the center open.

But that's not enough.

To keep going, it needs about \$75,000 to \$100,000 a year, said Native Animal Rescue board member Cliff Feldman. Until now, the center operated on about \$50,000 — almost all private donations. That paid for the three-member staff.

Ortiz said state Sen. Henry Mello and county Supervisor Fred Keeley had offered to help get funding on an emergency basis, if possible. "I don't want to get my hopes up, but what everyone expresses to me is that they do not want to see this thing go under," said Ortiz.

The group also needs a building. NAR has operated in a 174-square-foot room at the SPCA's 7th Avenue kennels. Barking dogs and this summer's road construction accompanied the marine bird crisis.

"If you could have seen the doz-

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Rescue will be expensive

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ens and dozens of seabirds with barking dogs on one side and never-ending construction on the other," said Feldman. "If I were a sick animal, I would have died too. It was just terrible."

The center has hunted for a new location to replace what was originally intended to be temporary quarters at the SPCA.

Rescue center and county officials were discussing the use of buildings at The Farm's former property on Soquel Drive near Cabrillo College, now owned by the county, Feldman said.

Ortiz said Monday The Farm buildings are still a possibility — if money is forthcoming.

Meanwhile, SPCA officials and other wildlife agencies scrambled to fill the void.

State Fish and Game officials gave verbal approval Friday for

the SPCA to receive and rehabilitate wildlife, said SPCA director Jody Paterniti. Temporary holding facilities have been set up at the SPCA to handle animals, and equipment such as blenders for food processing and heating pads is being bought, she said.

The animals the SPCA cannot care for will be taken to wildlife centers in other counties, she said.

Whether the SPCA will care for the wild animals permanently has not been decided, said Paterniti. "Our board must convene and look at the long-term situation," Paterniti said. "I'm reluctant to speculate what decision might be made ultimately."

Native Animal Rescue's Feldman contends that the SPCA contributed to the stress in the past few months by "harassing" native animal volunteers and refusing to

share laundry facilities or even a copying machine.

Paterniti denied there is hostility. "No, no, no," said Paterniti. "Our staff has conducted itself consistently with professionalism and caring." Paterniti added that she had been working with Ortiz to find a new location for Native Animal Rescue, a goal both organizations shared.

She said she had no idea of the extent of the problems.

"The information we received from them is that they had the funding to build something, they just needed the property, and that was something that could happen at any moment," said Paterniti.

Native Animal Rescue's phone number will remain in operation this month with information where sick and injured animals can be taken. The SPCA is not among the recommended places.