

Animal

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rescuers

closing

Lack of funds, site blamed

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After 15 years of caring for sick and dying creatures, Santa Cruz's Native Animal Rescue wildlife rehabilitation center said last week it planned to shut its doors as of today for lack of funds.

Staff members and volunteers at the non-profit center blamed the decision on both a cash shortage and the stress of working in cramped quarters on Seventh Avenue shared by the Santa Cruz Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

"It's extremely upsetting," said center volunteer Alysson Baker.

The center was overwhelmed this summer with more than 400 sick and dying seabirds that mysteriously began washing ashore in Monterey Bay. The birds apparently were starving, but no explanation for the large numbers affected has been found.

Gail Ortiz, president of the center's board of directors, said the wild animals it cares for have been unduly stressed by the barking dogs at the SPCA, making their recovery difficult.

The SPCA has allowed the center to use 180 square feet of space rent-free, and the center does not have enough money to move into bigger, quieter quarters, Baker said.

Friction between the center and the SPCA contributed to the decision to close, Ortiz said.

"Our relationship with SPCA has not been good," Ortiz said. "The situation has worsened in the last couple of months, and our staff basically said they just can't do it anymore."

SPCA spokeswoman Marilee Geyer said the news was a surprise.

"We're shocked and saddened by this," Geyer said. "They certainly do an excellent job, and it's a real critical need."

The SPCA does not have a wildlife rehabilitation license and will have to apply for one before it can care for wild animals, Geyer said.

"We're going to do the best we can to take over their services," she said.

Native Animal Rescue has been run by three staff members and several volunteers on a budget of about \$50,000 a year, all from private donations, Baker said.

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