

Animal Shelter Wildlife rescuers ponder future

■ Outlook:

Board says center needs at least \$130,000 and a bigger, quieter site to care for ailing birds and wild animals.

BY JOHN WOOLFOLK
Mercury News Staff Writer

After being torn apart by the stress of cramped, noisy quarters and a slim budget, members of Santa Cruz County's only wildlife rehabilitation center are trying to pick up the pieces and start over.

The 15-year-old Native Animal Rescue, overwhelmed this summer with more than 400 sick seabirds that mysteriously washed ashore, shut its Seventh Avenue doors Aug. 13, citing lack of funds. All but two members of the non-profit group's board of directors have since resigned.

This week, remaining board members Cliff

Feldman and Lana Pieri said they hope to revive the organization and are trying to assemble a new board of directors.

"For me, personally, this was left unfinished and it was very distasteful," Feldman said. "I didn't want it to end this way."

If a new board is put together, its chief task will be to secure a larger, more stable government funding source, Feldman said. The center had been operating on about \$50,000 a year, almost entirely from private donations.

Ironically, this year was the center's most successful, with \$70,000, including a \$500 contribution the group had requested from the county, Feldman said. But even that

wasn't enough to keep it afloat. Comparable organizations, he said, have annual budgets of around \$275,000, and Native Animal Rescue would need at least \$130,000 a year to survive.

"I think Native Animal Rescue has to be looked at as a business," Feldman said. "You can't operate a business on donations. Donations certainly play a role, but government funds and grants need to play a larger role."

In addition to funding, the center must tackle another headache — finding a roomier, quieter home. Its former quarters, 180 square feet of kennel space shared with the Santa

See **WILDLIFE**, Page 4B

4B

San Jose Mercury News • **Local** • Wednesday, August 23, 1995

Animal rescue center ponders future

■ WILDLIFE

from Page 1B

Cruz Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, were cited as a leading cause of the group's breakup. Center staffers and volunteers complained that barking dogs at the kennel stressed their ailing wildlife and frustrated recovery efforts.

County officials are considering offering space in The Farm restaurant property on Soquel Drive, Feldman said. The buildings would require remodeling, and the site would only be temporary because the county plans to turn the property into a park, he said.

Supervisors Fred Keeley and Janet Beautz said the county, along with other local governments, may be able to contribute more funding as well.

"We're in the exploratory stages of seeing what, if anything, we can do for them," Kee-

ley said. "Obviously, Native Animal Rescue has provided a very important service in our community."

A permanent home, with state funding to help build it, may be available on Wells Fargo Bank's Terrace Point property next to Long Marine Laboratory. In a June 30 memo, the California Department of Fish and Game tentatively offered Native Animal Rescue up to \$200,000 toward such a center to care for oiled seabirds and other injured wildlife.

Such a move would hinge on Wells Fargo's success in developing the site, which it hopes to turn into a marine research center with Long Marine Lab, run by the University of California, Santa Cruz. The controversial project has been opposed by Westside Santa Cruz residents who fear it will increase traffic.

But Native Animal Rescue could be a boost for the development, now that federal research agencies that had been a key com-

ponent of it are backing out due to budget cuts.

"We'd love to have them," said Stuart Kensing, Wells Fargo Bank's project manager for Terrace Point. "They'd work nicely there. I know they're well loved by everyone."

In the absence of Native Animal Rescue, the SPCA has been given state permission to accept injured wild animals. But spokeswoman Marilee Geyer said the SPCA does not have the money, room or staff to deal with them, and is sending the creatures to centers in San Mateo and Monterey. The SPCA receives \$900,000 a year from the county for animal control services, but isn't paid for wildlife rehabilitation, she said.

"It would be wonderful if Native Animal Rescue could get up and running again, because we're facing the same problems they were," Geyer said. "Money for this isn't provided in our contract."