

Native Animal Rescue Closed for Business

County's Only Wildlife Rescue Center Shuts Doors Without Notice
New Board Forms To Make Plans For Reopening

by Mary Bryant

While the cause of a recent, rampant upsurge in sick and dying marine mammals and waterfowl remains a mystery, there is little doubt about the reason for the loss of the region's only wildlife rehabilitation center. Native Animal Rescue (NAR) closed because workers were finally overwhelmed by the enormity of their task and unable to continue on without appropriate resources or staffing, said NAR's former president.

Ending a more than decade-long crusade to rehabilitate birds and wildlife injured in their contact with urban environments, NAR's board of directors announced the facility's closing on August 13 with the resignation of NAR's executive director Lori Moak-Kean.

Remarking that recent fundraising efforts for Native Animal Rescue (NAR) had been more successful than ever before, NAR's most recent president Gayle Ortiz said that demands grew faster than pledges.

"[Fundraising] was certainly going better than it had ever gone," said Ortiz. "But we had a budget of \$70,000 last year. We were in the process of raising \$70,000. ... And [then] our executive director did a

budget of what she thought the needs were to operate [the center], and [the proposed budget] was about \$225,000."

Ortiz said the current rash of seabird deaths and mammal illnesses had stretched the mostly volunteer organization to the breaking point.

"We were really a long shot from being anywhere near making it for the number of animals we were seeing," said Ortiz. "Our staff just got so burnt out. ... We really needed a bigger staff, and we just could never raise the money to do it."

Phone lines for NAR will remain open through the end of August, directing callers to out-of-county wildlife centers, although no advice on the care of injured or ill animals is currently available. The local chapter of the Society for the Prevention and Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) has secured a temporary license from the state Department of Fish and Game to accept native animals. However, the license limits SPCA workers to take in animals for euthanasia or transport to a fully licensed facility. The temporary permit does not allow SPCA to offer rehabilitation services.

Sudden Announcement Surprise to Many NAR Supporters

Ortiz acknowledged that the announcement was sudden, and

said that the decision to close NAR has also been unexpected.

Working with a variety of city and county officials, NAR's board members had managed to gain first-ever municipal grants for NAR, adding to a thriving community fundraising drive. Plans were even under way for the organization to move to larger quarters at the site near the county's moderate-income housing project on Soquel Drive, formerly the site of The Farm restaurant and retail center.

"The county has tentatively offered Native Animal [space in an existing building on the land] at the Farm. ... I think we could get it for free," said Ortiz. "But, then operating at a higher level was going to cost more money. And, that money was figured into the \$225,000 [proposed budget]."

NAR volunteers and staff had been working out of 174 square feet room donated by and located adjacent to the SPCA facilities in Live Oak.

Complicating the logistical problems of limited space, barking dogs and vehicular traffic made the work of rehabilitating injured wildlife more challenging, a challenge that Ortiz said finally was too much for Moak-Kean.

"She had been working at it for so long and so hard," said Ortiz. "I think she went on too long."

For the time, Moak-Kean said she would be declining interviews.

"I really do need to step away from all of this, and try to regroup," wrote Moak-Kean in response to an interview request from The Post.

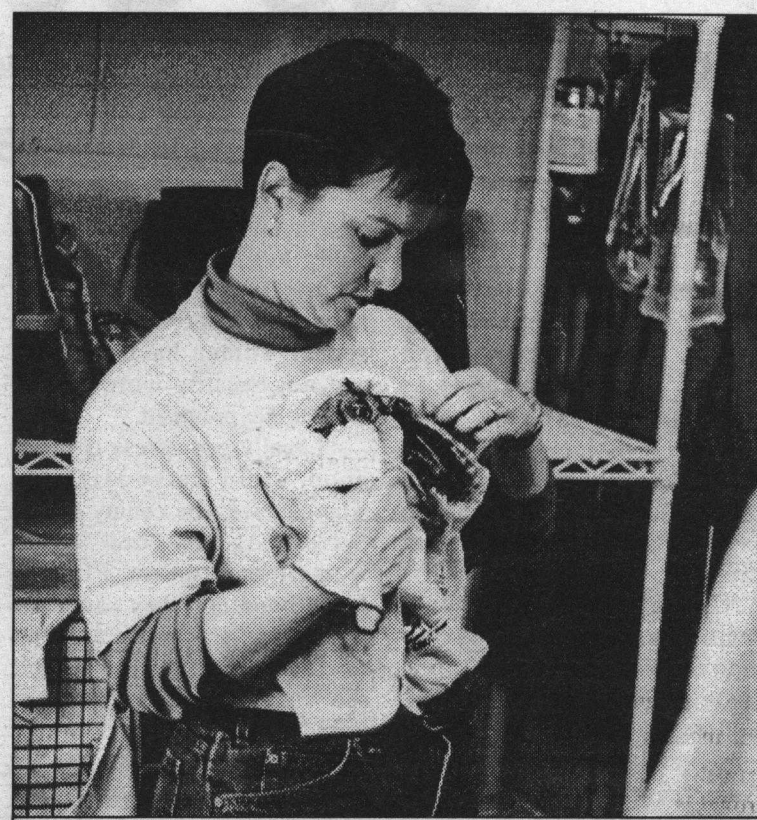
Ortiz said she believed the final hurdle that tripped Moak-Kean — a woman who had become synonymous with the organization she ran for many years — came when an injured deer was brought into the center in August.

Unable to provide space for a fawn that was badly hurt in a vehicular accident, Moak-Kean was forced to put down the animal.

Over the Rainbow

Ortiz said she believes that state legislation may be necessary to secure regular and sufficient funding to support the rehabilitation of injured wildlife.

"The state mandates that a community must take care of its domestic animals, but it does not mandate the same thing for native animals or wild animals," said



Lori Moak-Kean: "The biosphere and all its components are interdependent (and) humanity is part of nature."

Ortiz. "I'm at the point now that I think that ... some kind of bill needs to be passed that the state mandates communities to take care of native animals."

However, Ortiz said that during tight fiscal times, hope for new funding mandates remains dim.

Ortiz also said that with the closure of the facility, she had found it necessary to announce her resignation as NAR's president on August 17.

"I don't have the time it is going to take to start a new organization," said Ortiz. "It's a very bitter decision for me. But I can't do it."

Ortiz said that of the original board, two members remained. A new member was also appointed at the August 17 meeting. For the moment, she reported that Cliff Feldman of Feldman Advertising and Design would be overseeing the initial planning of a new NAR agency.

Ortiz said there was some hope in finding on-going resources from special grants, noting that one of the failures of the most recent effort to revitalize NAR had been the absence of grant campaigns.

"We had tried to get people to write grants. And, we were very unsuccessful," said Ortiz.

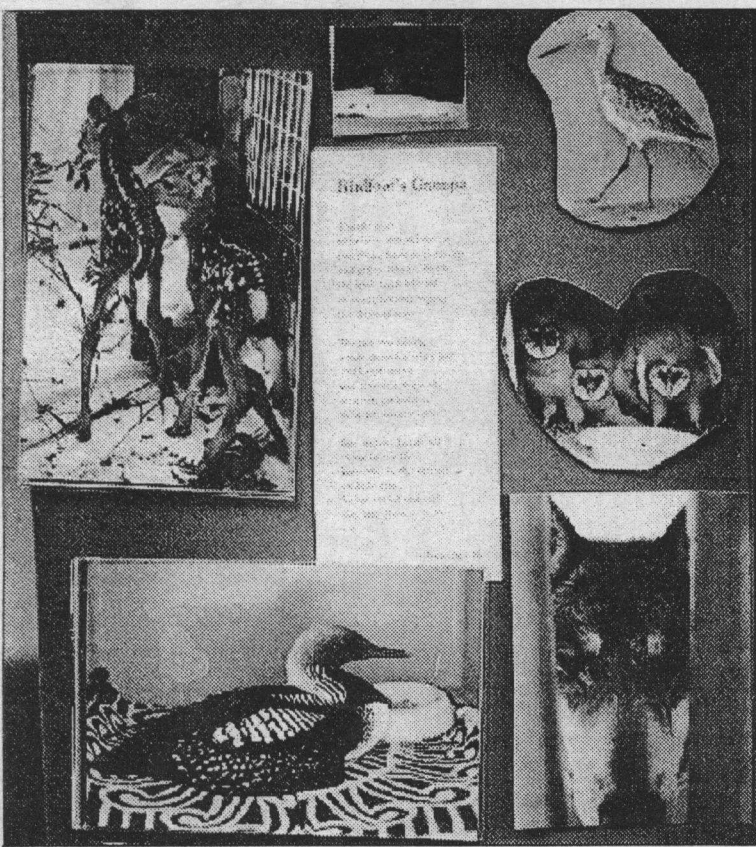
Ortiz added that for NAR supporters to again open their doors to injured wildlife, much would have to change.

"The money is just going to have to come from a lot of sources. I personally believe that based on NAR's small efforts to get community support, [NAR] got an incredible amount of support from the community. \$70,000 is a lot for a little organization like NAR. ... I am very proud of our community."

In a written statement about her resignation, Moak-Kean was not nearly as forbearing about the passage of an organization dedicated to the well-being of native animals.

"While specific issues come and go, a veterinarian colleague said it best when she observed that all humankind needs to understand several basic principles: that the biosphere and all its components are interdependent; that humanity is part of nature; that nature in and of itself has intrinsic value; that biological and cultural diversity are fundamental characteristics of nature; and that we all have a responsibility to care for the community of life," Moak-Kean wrote. "This county's continuing challenge is to make this understanding a universal guide for human conduct." □

Editor's Note: NAR is asking for continuing contributions. Letters of interest or donations may be sent to NAR, P.O. Box 1001, Santa Cruz, CA 95061-1001.



This view of a photo collection at NAR's old office best expresses the purpose of their efforts: to save lives and help those who were often helpless.