

PLUS: DEALING WITH B.C.'S BUNNY BOOM

AnimalSense

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INSIDE: **ON-FARM WELFARE**

Does Canada
measure up
globally?

ANIMAL PROTECTION EVOLVED

How our definition
of “protecting and
enhancing” has
changed over
the years

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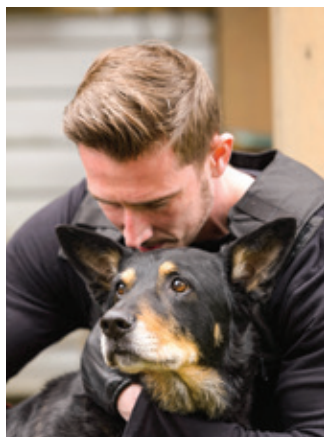
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INSIDE

THE BC SPCA

FALL/WINTER 2022

**On the cover**

The BC SPCA's services now encompass not just physical, but psychological threats to at-risk animals – while also supporting their guardians.

Photo by Viktoria Haack

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**BCSPCA**

is a not-for-profit reliant on support from animal lovers like you. To explore ways to show you care, visit spca.bc.ca. **THANK YOU!**

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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



Dear Friends,

The BC SPCA's animal protection officers are regularly called upon to remove animals in distress – either as a result of intentional cruelty, which is thankfully rare, or wanton neglect from their guardian. But sometimes our officers encounter animals living in challenging situations despite the best efforts of their guardians, who often put their beloved pet before themselves. Our officers are trained to err on the side of what's in the best interest of the animal and in cases such as these, it's often best for the pet to stay with their guardian. In this edition of the magazine, readers will learn more about an innovative new BC SPCA program deploying alternative measures that seek to support these vulnerable animals while supporting their vulnerable guardians at the same time.

We also examine the state of Canada's approach to the treatment and protection of farm animals, measuring it against jurisdictions that profile similar to the demographics of our country. Do we stack up well in comparison with the European Union or the United States, as government and industry would have you believe? Or are we a laggard in farm animal welfare?

There is furthermore a great feature on how to capture wildlife in photos without disturbing them in their natural habitat. Thank you for your continued, invaluable support for the work of the BC SPCA.

Craig Daniell
Chief Executive Officer
BC SPCA

A HELPING HOME

THE BC SPCA IS PARTNERING with BC Housing on a two-year pilot program to aid animals and pet guardians living in supportive housing. The goal of the pilot is to foster the safety and well-being of both animals and humans in at least 10 supportive housing buildings and shelters within Vancouver's Downtown Eastside by creating pet policies, education and training programs, and long-term strategies for sustaining good animal care and welfare.

The pilot includes the development of a suite of training resources for staff and residents on pet care and training; expanded BC SPCA outreach programs to



Vernon and his pooch Maya are just two of the Downtown Eastsiders benefiting from a new pilot project.

help residents access spay/neuter, pet food banks and preventative care supports; a mentorship strategy to help residents develop animal welfare knowledge and skills they can share with others; and recommendations for pet policies that help create safe and healthy situations for pets and residents. □

NEW SHELTER FOR RICHMOND ANIMALS

THE CITY OF RICHMOND and the BC SPCA officially opened a brand-new shelter for stray and abandoned animals on July 22. Operated by the BC SPCA, it can accommodate up to 17 dogs and 40 cats, as well as rabbits and other small animals.

"The new facility incorporates several best-practice features, including isolation areas for sick and injured animals to limit

disease or cross-contamination; separate housing areas for animals with behaviour concerns; as well as multiple outdoor exercise areas for dogs, catios for cats and an outdoor fenced area for farm animals such as chickens, roosters and goats," says BC SPCA chief operations officer Parm Takhar. The building's leading-edge features also include heated floors within the kennels, Solatube lighting to bring sunlight into kennel areas, and hygienic and eco-friendly drain and cleaning systems. To view animals for adoption in Richmond, visit spca.bc.ca/richmond. □



BECOME A MEMBER!



SHOW YOUR SUPPORT for animals by becoming a Member of the BC SPCA. Members help direct the vision and mission of the BC SPCA, and under our amended Bylaws have been accorded enhanced rights and privileges, including the right to directly elect the Board of Directors. Visit our website at spca.bc.ca/membership for more information or to apply for/renew your membership. □

THE CAT CAME BACK

WHEN MIRI WENT MISSING from her family's home in Victoria, they were devastated and searched for months, putting up posters around the neighbourhood, desperately hoping she would return. They had begun to lose hope when they received an unexpected call from the BC SPCA in Nanaimo of all places, saying Miri was in their care. No one knows how the three-and-a-half-year-old cat made the more than 100-kilometre journey – but thanks to her microchip, she was immediately reunited with her family.

Miri had been found by a Good Samaritan, who saw that she was injured and took her to a veterinary clinic. Once she had been treated, she was transferred to the Nanaimo BC SPCA, where she was scanned



Long-lost kitty Miri was reunited with her guardians thanks to the BC Pet Registry.

for a microchip. “We are so thankful to the Good Samaritan who brought Miri to the veterinarian and the fact that we registered Miri,” says guardian Megan. “Without it we would never have been reunited.”

It's because of stories like this that the BC SPCA strongly recommends microchips and other

permanent identification for all pets. If you already have a chip, consider registering with the BC SPCA's BC Pet Registry program. Lost companion animals often end up at the BC SPCA and the Pet Registry can be accessed by staff in veterinary clinics and SPCA shelters across the province. □



GRANDMA'S ON A ROLL

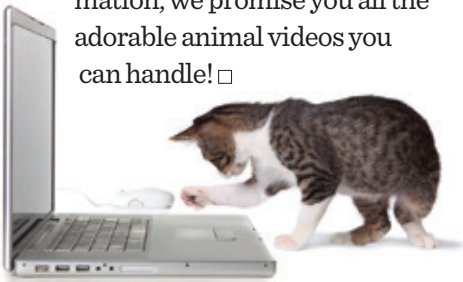
WHEN SONYA BARDATI was looking for a special way to celebrate her 80th birthday in August, her love of animals came immediately to mind. The adventurous great-grandmother, who adopted her cat, Holly, from the SPCA in Victoria in 2011, decided to do a Champions for Animals fundraiser for the BC SPCA by rollerblading 350 kilometres from Port Hardy to Parksville on Vancouver Island. Along the way, Sonya collected nearly \$7,000 in donations for injured and abused animals!

You don't have to hit the road like Sonya to make a life-saving difference. The BC SPCA's Champions for Animals program encourages people to create their own unique fundraiser – from asking for donations in lieu of birthday or wedding gifts, to hosting a wine-and-cheese party, to collecting donations at your team's next softball game. We invite all Champions to enhance their efforts by setting up an online fundraising page through our Champions for Animals website (champions.sPCA.bc.ca). Thank you to Sonya and all of our amazing Champions! □

GET CONNECTED



WANT TO BE THE FIRST to receive breaking SPCA news and expert tips on all things animal-related? Sign up for our monthly Anim@ls e-newsletter at spca.bc.ca/animals, and follow the BC SPCA on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok. More than just news and information, we promise you all the adorable animal videos you can handle! □



ANIMAL LOVER GIVES BACK, WINS BIG

CAN YOU IMAGINE WINNING the huge BC SPCA Lottery 50/50 draw? For Val, who had purchased just a single

ticket, landing the \$371,255 prize was “a total shock and something I never dreamed of,” she says. Now this retired mother of two and her husband are making plans to share their winnings with their family and create some precious memories.

For Val, purchasing a Lottery 50/50 ticket was a way to show her love for animals and to help those in need. “It just warms my heart to know that in some small way I’ve done something to help out,” says Val. “At this stage in my life, I think it’s so important to give back. With the amount of money it takes to house and care for all of the animals the BC SPCA rescues, I think it’s a good investment.”

Thank you for your caring support, Val! We’re so grateful to have a kind animal lover like you in the BC SPCA community. □

SUMMER CAMP BURSARY PROGRAM HONOURS A LOST SON

A GENEROUS GIFT FROM Brett and Danielle VanderHoek, volunteers at the BC SPCA in Vernon, is ensuring children experience the joys and community of BC SPCA summer camps. After enduring the heartbreaking loss of their young son Embry, Brett and Danielle were looking for a way to honour their boy while also helping others. “We wanted to do something positive in Embry’s memory and helping kids and animals just felt like the right thing,” the couple explains.

The family decided to set up an endowment to provide camp bursaries for children to ensure Embry’s memory would live on. The Embry VanderHoek Memorial Fund removes financial barriers for children who might otherwise not have the opportunity to enjoy the summer camp experience. The first group of Embry’s bursary campers attended both virtual and in-person BC SPCA camps this past summer, a tradition that will continue for years to come. “768 youth participated in our camps in 2022, with nearly 80 through our bursary program,” says Craig Naherniak, BC SPCA chief, social change. Thank you, VanderHoek family, for choosing to honour Embry by bringing joy to so many other children. ■



Youth bursary program co-founder Brett VanderHoek plays a little lakeside fetch with his dog Beckham.

Below: Eileen Drever
early in her career as an
animal protection officer.

Opposite page: Eileen
in Williams Lake, helping
care for horses rescued
from a hot spot.



ANIMAL PROTECTION EVOLVED

Our understanding of how to protect
vulnerable animals, and their guardians,
has become much more nuanced – and
much more effective



WHEN the BC SPCA's Eileen Drever began her career in animal welfare 43 years ago, the field of animal protection looked very different than it does in 2022.

"When I started out, the emphasis was solely on relieving the physical distress of an animal," she says. "Officers dealt with issues stemming from a lack of food, water and shelter, or physical pain and suffering. The laws then didn't really address an animal's psychological or emotional well-being."

But Drever, who worked in SPCA shelters in the Lower Mainland for two decades before serving in the Society's investigations department from 2001-2022, says increased knowledge and understanding about the needs of animals and the BC SPCA's significant investment in the area of animal protection have changed the landscape for investigations. "One major difference I've seen is a much more holistic approach to the health and well-being of the animals."

“No matter how many investigations we’ve all worked on, every single animal we rescue – great or small – takes a piece of our heart.”

Drever was, in fact, the first special provincial constable in British Columbia to successfully obtain a warrant to seize an animal based solely on psychological distress. "We had been called to a local park in Delta, where a Good Samaritan had seen someone abandoning a litter of puppies in extremely cold temperatures," she recalls. "Not only were we able to get the puppies to safety, but the individual had followed the person home and provided us with an address." Special provincial constables attended the residence and found the mother of the puppies. "We were able to obtain a warrant to take her into our custody, even though she was not in physical distress, by arguing that a nursing mother would be

experiencing intense anxiety not knowing where her puppies were and would have an instinctual and psychological need to care for them." Since that precedent-setting case, the emotional health of animals is regularly considered by judges in the definition of distress.

Another major shift Drever has seen is the recognition that helping a pet guardian is often the key to helping their animal. During her 27 years as a special provincial constable and senior animal protection officer for the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley, Drever led thousands of investigations into neglect and abuse, including the high-profile Whistler sled dog case, several major inquiries on commercial farms, the case of Hazina the hippo at the Greater Vancouver Zoo and multiple large-scale puppy mill seizures. But she says it was the cases involving individual animals and their guardians that gave her the biggest insights into how she could best perform her duties. "There are obviously many investigations where animals are in danger and it's necessary to remove them and to recommend criminal charges," she reflects. "But so often I would come across situations where a person truly loved their pet but the animal was in some sort of distress because of lack of funds. The guardian wanted to do the right thing but was too afraid to reach out for help in case their animal was taken away." In those situations, says Drever, providing resources such as pet food, flea medication or support for veterinary care is the best and most compassionate option.



Special provincial constable Felix Cheung works to support vulnerable animals and guardians on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

“Not only is it better for the person, but it is also better for the animal, who is bonded to their guardian. We want people to understand that the BC SPCA is here to protect animals from deliberate cruelty and abuse, but when a guardian is really trying to care for their pet, our role is to see how we can support them so they can stay together. People should never be afraid to reach out to us.”

Marcie Moriarty, who oversees the BC SPCA's investigation services across the province, says a recent name change for the department – from Cruelty Investigations to Animal Protection – reflects the understanding that the majority of the more than 8,000 complaints her team responds to each year do not involve deliberate or intentional cruelty. “Across the animal welfare movement, we are seeing the emergence of the ‘One

“ We have invested a lot of time and effort into developing partnerships and relationships with a wide range of social service agencies so that we can go into a situation looking for solutions that benefit both the animal and their guardian.

Health’ model – an understanding that the health of humans and animals are interdependent and you have to look at the whole situation to understand how an animal may have come to be in a state that requires intervention.” She notes that many of the files her protection officers respond to involve individuals dealing with

mental illness, poverty or other life challenges. “We have invested a lot of time and effort into developing partnerships and relationships with a wide range of social service agencies so that we can go into a situation looking for solutions that benefit both the animal and their guardian.”

Special provincial constable Felix Cheung, an animal protection officer who has worked regularly on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside for the past two years, says it is essential to approach people in vulnerable communities through the lens of a helper rather than an enforcer. “I’ve seen firsthand how people will put their animals before themselves, sometimes using all their money on their pet,” he explains. “To a lot of these individuals, their animals are the only thing in their life that helps ground them to a sense of

normalcy and stability. They are doing their best but sometimes lack the resources to provide the level of care they wish they could give their pets.” Cheung says having funding available through the Animal Protection Services’ alternative measures program means he is able to help many more guardians.

“I remember one file where a woman living in supportive housing was hospitalized and had no one to care for her three small, senior dogs, who were very clearly bonded to her and to one another,” Cheung says. “Luckily her support staff reached out to one of our local SPCA shelters and they cared for her dogs until she was well again. Since older dogs tend to suffer from dental disease, all three dogs needed extensive dental work. We were able to provide that for them so

the woman and her dogs could continue to live happily together.”

Unfortunately, there are times when animals must be taken away for their own protection. “The most difficult part of my job is having to remove animals from people who are well-intentioned but who have some form of mental illness or disability that prevents them from properly caring for their animals,” says Cheung. “I’ve come across people who are the most loving, caring individuals in the world towards their animal, but an episode of psychosis can put their animal in harm’s way and the guardian isn’t even aware it’s happening.” The onus is on attending officers to discern if an animal can safely stay in a situation. “If an animal is found to be in distress, we will always work with the guardian about what they need to do to alleviate the

distress,” Cheung continues. “If they are willing to work with our recommendations, we rarely end up having to remove the animal.”

Eileen Drever says she gets emotional when she thinks of all the positive changes she has seen over her long career in animal protection. “Despite all the challenges we still face, I never thought I would see the day when animals were valued the way they are in today’s society, or that the investigations department would grow in size and expertise in the way it has. We’ve really come so far.”

Despite the changes, Drever says one thing remains constant for the SPCA officers who dedicate their lives to protecting animals. “No matter how many investigations we’ve all worked on, every single animal we rescue – great or small – takes a piece of our heart.” ■

CARE IN A CRISIS

WHAT IF YOUR PET was injured and suffering but you weren’t able to help them? This was the case for the family of Jax, a boxer-cross whose leg was broken after he was struck by a vehicle. Jax’s family was in the midst of a fire evacuation in their hometown of Lytton when the accident occurred and they weren’t able to get their beloved dog to a veterinary clinic. They reached out to emergency services in Cache Creek, who called the BC SPCA.

“Special provincial constable Kent Kokoska immediately drove out to meet the family and brought Jax back to Kamloops for veterinary treatment,” says Sarah Gerow of the BC SPCA in Kamloops. Jax was assessed by specialists and underwent surgery to repair his broken leg. He was then transferred to the SPCA for post-operative care. Jax’s medical costs

were covered by the SPCA and once he was healthy, he was driven home to be reunited with his very relieved family.

Kokoska, a veteran SPCA animal protection officer, says that working with pet guardians to provide help and resources is a key part of his job. “We’re so glad when families like Jax’s reach out to us. We know that people love their pets and sometimes they just need a little help. They may have temporarily fallen on hard times or have health issues that have impacted their ability to provide care.” Kokoska furthermore notes that by dropping off pet food, offering transport or access to veterinary care, or even just providing information on how to care for their pet, the SPCA does whatever it can to keep pets and families together. “We’re here to help preserve that bond that is so important to both the animal and their guardian.” □



A Kamloops family requests help for their dog Jax, who is taken to Valley View Veterinary Clinic by Constable Kent Kokoska.





FARM ANIMAL WELFARE: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

How do Canada's standards stack up against those of the European Union and the United States?

Each year, more than 800 million farm animals are raised and killed for food in Canada. Most of them live in close confinement to maximize production and keep operational costs low, but this comes at a cost to their welfare.

"People are demanding improvements to farm animal welfare and more transparency in how animals are raised," says Melissa Speirs, BC SPCA's manager of farm animal welfare.

So how does Canada's progress on improving that welfare compare to the European Union (EU) and our neighbours in California and Washington State?

In Canada, there are farm animal Codes of Practice that are voluntary minimum welfare standards. Each

animal type – egg-laying hens, dairy cattle, pigs, etc. – have their own code. Some codes call for a phase-out of cramped cages, crates and stalls, whereas others still permit their use. "The codes address issues such as painful practices and overcrowding but there is no independent verification that these minimum welfare standards are being implemented on-farm," Speirs explains.

CRYING FOWL

Egg-laying hens, for example, are primarily kept in small wire battery cages. Each hen has less space than a page of this very magazine, and there are six to eight birds per cage – with cages stacked floor to ceiling in long rows. There is no enrichment, which leads to stress

and frustration. The Canadian egg industry plans to phase out battery cages by 2036, 24 years after the EU. Unfortunately, many farms are replacing battery cages with "enriched cages."

"Enriched cages offer slightly more space and some welfare improvements [for example, perches and nesting areas], but they are still crowded," says Speirs. The BC SPCA advocates cage-free housing for hens. California and Washington have committed to going cage-free by 2022 and 2024, respectively. On the bright side, B.C. has the largest proportion of cage-free egg-laying farms in Canada at 30 per cent.

FIELD OF DREAMS

Many people are surprised to learn

that most dairy cows in Canada never graze on pasture. Worse, 73 per cent are tied to their stalls. “As you can imagine, this limits the ability of cows to exercise, socialize, graze and more,” Speirs notes. Canada, the EU, California and Washington all permit tie-stalls. The BC SPCA is calling for an urgent phase-out of tie-stalls in the Canadian dairy code, currently under revision and set to be released next year. B.C. has only seven tie-stall farms (four per cent of all B.C. dairy farms), compared to Quebec’s 2,552 (90 per cent) and Ontario’s 1,252 (67 per cent).

SOW STALLING

In Canada, pregnant pigs (sows) are commonly kept individually in gestation stalls. Within these narrow metal crates, the sow can lie down and stand up, but can’t turn around. This leads to




















stress, frustration and boredom. Canada is phasing out this form of housing by 2024. However, the code will still allow temporary stall use during the beginning of sow pregnancy, which aligns with the EU standard. Canada is nine years behind the EU in making this change, while California is currently working to ban gestation stalls altogether.

WHY THE DIFFERENT STANDARDS?

Each country has the power to set its own farm animal welfare protections. Countries within the EU must meet all EU legislation regarding farm animal welfare, but many go beyond those requirements to offer further protection. In Canada, laws that protect animals are often established at the provincial level, and differ between

provinces, just as the U.S. differs from state to state.

As the chart below indicates, Canada is not a leader in farm animal welfare and is losing ground to more progressive jurisdictions such as the EU, California and Washington State. To remedy this situation, the BC SPCA believes the Codes of Practice should be prescriptive requirements in law in all provinces, with an independent on-farm inspection system to improve transparency. Canada has made some important strides, but continued public pressure is necessary. “The public can also improve farm animal welfare by embracing more plant-based food and, if buying animal products, purchase higher-welfare options such as certified organic, welfare certified and cage-free eggs,” encourages Speirs. ■

HOUSING SYSTEM	 CANADA	 EUROPEAN UNION	 CALIFORNIA	 WASHINGTON
 EGG-LAYING HENS ARE CAGE-FREE	 PHASE-OUT OF BATTERY CAGES BY 2036 NOT COMPLETELY CAGE-FREE, ENRICHED CAGES STILL PERMITTED	 PHASE-OUT OF BATTERY CAGES BY 2012 NOT COMPLETELY CAGE-FREE, ENRICHED CAGES STILL PERMITTED	 CAGE-FREE BY 2022	 CAGE-FREE BY 2024
 DAIRY COWS HOUSED IN GROUPS	 NO BAN ON TIE-STALLS	 NO BAN ON TIE-STALLS	 NO BAN ON TIE-STALLS	 NO BAN ON TIE-STALLS
 PREGNANT PIGS HOUSED IN GROUPS	 PHASE-OUT OF GESTATION STALLS BY 2024, TEMPORARY USE PERMITTED	 PHASE-OUT OF GESTATION STALLS BY 2013, TEMPORARY USE PERMITTED	 PHASE-OUT OF GESTATION STALLS BY 2022, CURRENTLY BEING CHALLENGED IN COURT	 GESTATION STALLS PERMITTED

“People are demanding improvements to farm animal welfare and more transparency in how animals are raised.”

“The codes address issues such as painful practices and overcrowding but there is no independent verification that these minimum welfare standards are being implemented on-farm.”



BACKYARD HABITATS

1ST PLACE - Claire Heath (Richmond) - Chickadee, "Pink perch" (above)

WILD SETTINGS

1ST PLACE - Bruce Turnbull (Penticton) - Bighorn sheep, "Bighorns in battle" (right)

Shutterbugs

IN THE WILD The DOs and DON'Ts of wildlife photography – keeping photographers and their subjects safe

British Columbia's wide range of habitats and diversity of animals makes wildlife photography popular for both amateurs and professionals.

"People are drawn to wild animals because of their appreciation and love of nature," says Erin Ryan, wild animal welfare specialist at the BC SPCA. "We even see ourselves in some of their behaviours."

Yet though they may seem like kindred spirits, make no mistake, Ryan cautions: these are wild animals who retain all of their wild instincts.

Photographers must be aware of this and take steps to protect themselves and the animals they are photographing.

DO, for your and the animal's safety, respect their wildness and keep your distance. The amount of space you should keep between you and an animal varies species to species, but in general, the larger the creature, the more distance there should be.

"Even for smaller animals, the minimum distance should be at least 10 feet," Ryan advises.

DON'T turn your back on a potentially dangerous wild animal. If they're feeling threatened and

you turn your back, they may take that opportunity to pounce and end the threat.

DO know the signs of stress in an animal – back away and leave the area if you see those signs.

"Signs of stress vary with each species," says Ryan. "Elk may stomp their hooves or move side to side, birds might fluff up their feathers to appear larger and some animals might just freeze and hope not to be seen."

Ryan notes that if the animal isn't moving, they may be trying to hide and use camouflage to protect themselves, especially during seasons when babies are



WILDLIFE-IN-FOCUS WINNERS!

CONGRATULATIONS to Claire Heath of Richmond and Bruce Turnbull of Penticton, who received top honours for their photos in the BC SPCA's 14th annual Wildlife-in-Focus photography contest. As ever, participants competed in two categories: Backyard Habitats (highlighting our special relationship with wild animals in our own backyards) and Wild Settings (featuring animals in their natural habitats).

In addition to the top three picks in each category, the judges awarded honourable mentions to a number of incredible photos, while a People's Choice Award was selected by popular vote. The contest raised \$23,924 to help the BC SPCA's Wild Animal Rehabilitation Centre (Wild ARC) for injured and orphaned wildlife.

Visit spca.bc.ca/wildlife-in-focus to view the amazing contest photos. What's more, the winning shots have been printed on various items that are available for purchase through the BC SPCA's online store (shop.spca.bc.ca). □

nearby. Mammals with babies will often freeze as a defence strategy if someone gets too close. While this seems harmless in the moment, they may later move their entire family after you leave if they feel it is unsafe, causing disruption to their regular environment.

DON'T sacrifice an animal's welfare for a great shot.

"When it is migratory season, wildlife photographers get excited to photograph birds who are landing back home," Ryan explains. "But there are repercussions if you upset or startle them. Migration is a very energy-intensive endeavour and birds use up calories and fatigue their muscles travelling vast distances. If you get too close, startle them and they take flight, they may use the last of their resources to fly away from you, leaving them vulnerable to

predators and other threats."

DON'T use food to attract animals.

Wildlife feeding is always risky – it can lead to poor welfare and even death, and is a significant source of human-animal conflict. The BC SPCA is opposed to feeding wildlife because it can lead to malnutrition from improper diet and the spread of disease among animals gathered in unnaturally large groups. It can also result in habituation; being unafraid puts wildlife at risk of being hurt or killed. They're more susceptible to predators and vehicle collisions, and eventually get into trouble when people start to see them as a nuisance.

DO support Instagram warnings for posts where people are exhibiting inappropriate or dangerous behaviours that impact animals.

"Instagram sends a warning when they see the *#wildlifeseelfie*," says Ryan. "Let Instagram know

you support these and other efforts to reduce the risk to people and animals."

DON'T forget about sensitive ecosystems. People will sometimes stomp on critical and fragile plant life to get a good photograph.

"I grew up in Kamloops, where there are delicate silt cliffs," says Ryan. "It takes a long time for plants to root. If you climb up the hill, you could destroy plants that took ages to get there. They might just be small little plants, but it takes a lot of work for them to grow and root." ■

For more information on wildlife, visit spca.bc.ca/wildlife-in-focus.



“ Rabbits have wonderful personalities. They make excellent pets for folks who know what to expect.

CAN YOU HELP A BUNNY OUT?

Foster and adoptive homes are needed for a record number of rabbits in BC SPCA care

Late this past summer, BC SPCA animal protection officers rescued more than 30 neglected rabbits from a Vancouver residence where they were being bred for profit. The rabbits ranged in age from newborns to adults.

Eileen Drever, senior officer for protection and stakeholder relations at the BC SPCA, says the rabbits were living in substandard and unsanitary conditions. “When our officers entered, the rooms smelled strongly of urine and feces,” she explains. “The floor, windowsill and bed were soiled and there were



cockroaches and other insects crawling around on all the surfaces.” She notes that the room where the animals were kept was hot and unventilated except for a window that had been left a few inches ajar.

“The room was filthy and the levels of ammonia were high,”

Drever continues. “Many of the rabbits had urine-soaked fur.” Furthermore, officers found an empty water bowl overturned, and while there was some hay near the bed, it was saturated with urine and feces and unsuitable for consumption.

Once taken into custody, the rabbits were transferred to several SPCA locations in the Lower Mainland, where staff ensured they received the food, water, shelter, grooming and veterinary care they so desperately needed. While a few of the rabbits have since been adopted, many are

still awaiting their forever homes.

This most recent seizure adds to an already burgeoning rabbit population in SPCA facilities across the province. “We have approximately 140 bunnies in our care right now, nearly twice the number we had at this time last year,” says Drever. “As a result, we are in urgent need of adopters as well as fosters for rabbits.”

Anyone looking to foster or adopt a rabbit is in for a real treat, says Meghann Cant, manager of companion animal welfare science and policy for the BC SPCA. Rabbits have long been overlooked and misunderstood as companion animals – in part because they have traditionally been kept outdoors, away from the family. However, those fortunate enough to spend some time with them are often surprised to discover just how affectionate and interactive they are. “Rabbits have wonderful and unique personalities,” says Cant. “They make excellent pets for folks who know what to expect.”

BUNNY BASICS: WHAT FOSTERS NEED TO KNOW

“Hopefully, the days of keeping rabbits in dark, cramped hutches in the backyard are behind us,” says Cant. Instead, they should be kept indoors in an area of the house where people hang out, ideally in a large, enriched enclosure or with free run of an entire room. This helps them integrate into family life, where they can thrive. Being crepuscular, rabbits are most active during the early morning and again during the early evening. “This makes them particularly well suited to folks who work a nine-to-five day,” Cant notes.

A rabbit’s enclosure must be big enough to fit food and water bowls, at least one litter box and at least one hideout, while still allowing them to take several unobstructed hops in a row. “The more space you can provide, the better,” says Cant. “Not only do larger cages keep rabbits happier and healthier, they also make your job a lot easier because they don’t get dirty as quickly.”



For out-of-cage time, which should happen daily, rabbit-proofing is crucial. “Rabbits tend to explore every nook and cranny and will get into things they shouldn’t,” says Cant. Basic rabbit-proofing includes moving household plants out of reach, covering electrical cords and blocking off access to objects that can be chewed (table legs are often a favourite!). “But the fact that rabbits can be house-trained makes out-of-cage time much easier to manage,” she adds.

When it comes to handling, Cant says, think tortoise, not hare: slow and steady wins the race. As prey

animals, rabbits are hardwired to be on the alert for potential danger and, as a result, can frighten easily. This is not to say that they do not enjoy human attention. Rather, the key is to handle them on their terms – and down at their level. “Swooping in to pick them up could be reminiscent of an attack from a predator,” says Cant. “Rabbits usually prefer to hang out with you on the floor instead of being held or carried about.”

Finally, if at all possible, Cant recommends keeping more than one rabbit, because of how social they are. “That way, they can keep each other company when you’re away from home,” she says. Given that rabbits are so prolific, spaying and neutering are absolutely essential, not only to keep male-female pairs together without the risk of unwanted litters, but also to prevent certain cancers and hormone-related behaviours such as aggression and urine-marking. “When you foster or adopt from the BC SPCA, you don’t have to worry because we take care of spaying and neutering,” says Cant.

With the BC SPCA experiencing a “bunny boom” right now, offering a temporary or forever home is a great way to help these vulnerable animals. “Folks new to rabbits shouldn’t be daunted by the prospect of adopting or fostering,” Cant explains. “Our staff will be there to support you every step of the way.” ■

To find out about rabbit fostering: spca.bc.ca/ways-to-help/volunteer/foster

To search for rabbits available for adoption: spca.bc.ca/adopt



With plenty of wilderness to explore and couches to lounge on, Rose is living it up in her forever home.



Above: Rose, when she first came into SPCA care, suffering from gunshot wounds to the neck and face.

ROSE BLOOMS ANEW

Rose, a German shepherd cross, was brought to the BC SPCA in Kelowna after being found on a property in Beavercreek with multiple gunshot wounds to her face and neck. Rose's injuries were so severe she required a number of life-saving surgeries to close her wounds and around-the-clock care to change her bandages. When Rose was released from the emergency hospital, she immediately went into an SPCA foster home to heal. Unfortunately, her trips to the veterinarian were far from over. She would return five times to deal with abscesses in her wounds.

Luckily, the picture became much "rosier" in June when she had the last of her sutures and

staples removed and found a forever home! "When we met Rose at the shelter, her legs were shaking so badly my husband D'Arcy stayed next to her for the three-and-a-half-hour drive home to make her feel more comfortable," says Rose's new guardian, Gwen. Once they arrived at the house, however, it only took about 15 minutes for Rose to settle in, and soon enough, she was sitting on the deck, surveying her new playground.

"She loves going for walks," says Gwen. "It is so lovely to see her happily bound up to me and D'Arcy when we are out on the trails."

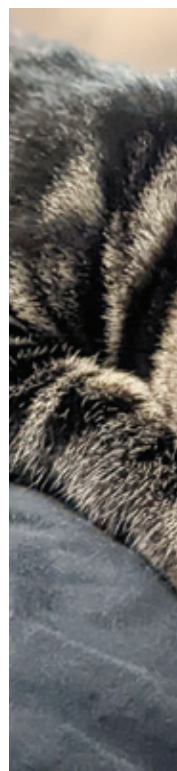
Gwen admits that Rose might get "just a little spoiled" with her new mom and dad. After all that she's been through, they want to give her the best life ever.

HIGHWAY TO HOME

A Good Samaritan was driving near Williams Lake when she noticed what appeared to be a "lump" on the white line at the edge of the highway. After she stopped and went back to investigate, she found a helpless, injured kitten. She wrapped the cat, now named Harper, in a towel, and with the help of her daughter found the nearest veterinary clinic.

When Harper was examined, they determined that she had a broken femur that most likely came from being hit or run over by a vehicle. "The break was so severe, amputation was the only option," says Liz Dighton, manager, BC SPCA Williams Lake and District. "She also had internal parasites but was in overall good health."

After some time healing with a foster, this three-legged sweetheart was adopted. The first home wasn't a perfect match because of other cats in the residence, but she was



adopted again and was soon purring away in her final forever home.

“She is literally the sweetest thing ever,” says her new mom, Tamara. “Harper is playing with lots of her new toys, but her favourite is still the shelter toy that came with her.”

Tamara adds that, despite being down a leg, Harper runs around the house just like any other cat. When she tries to walk slowly, it is a bit more of a challenge, but she’s getting better every day.



Harper catches a little shuteye, following a lengthy treatment and recovery process that required the amputation of her leg.



A pair of great blue herons are ready to soar again after a stint with Wild ARC.

“Thank you so much for introducing me to Harper,” Tamara enthuses, “and allowing me to welcome such a beautiful cat into my home and my family.”

SIBLING REVELRY

Two great blue heron chicks left the nest a little too soon this past summer, tumbling down to the ground. Although the siblings had only minor injuries, they couldn’t be put back in the nest with their parents, so they were taken to the BC SPCA’s Wild Animal Rehabilitation Centre (Wild ARC) in Metchosin until they were old enough to release back into their natural habitat.

“Great blue herons nest in large groups called rookeries,” says Erin Ryan, wild animal welfare specialist at the BC SPCA. “We were glad the siblings had each other while they were in our care. It definitely got loud at times.”

The team at Wild ARC had to take extra precautions when they were caring for the herons.

This included wearing rigid face shields to protect them from their beaks – an adult heron’s beak is strong enough to pierce a human’s chest! They also had to make sure the chicks did not imprint on them – an important factor for their eventual success in the wild. The face shields are reflective so the herons see themselves and not the faces of the people caring for them. The staff’s gowns and gloves also helped to keep the birds from recognizing them as human.

When it came to their enclosure, the siblings required “walls” made of large sheets of plywood. Herons, like many animals, feel safer when they think they can’t be seen, and the walls gave them somewhere to retreat when staff needed to enter their enclosure.

Thanks to their care at Wild ARC, the herons were strong enough to be released two months later. As staff looked on, the duo flew confidently back into the wilderness together. ■



ASK THE SPCA

WE ANSWER
YOUR QUESTIONS
ABOUT COMPANION,
FARM AND WILD
ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR

I'd like to get a second cat but I'm worried the two won't get along. What will I need to watch out for?

Knowing how cats feel about each other requires paying close attention to their body language. Cats who are strongly bonded will display what are called "affiliative" behaviours. These friendly behaviours are fairly easy to recognize

and include approaching one another with their tails held high, touching noses, rubbing their heads, bodies and tails against each other, sleeping in close contact and mutual grooming.

Conflict behaviours, conversely, are not always easy to spot. There are the obvious signs, of course, such as tail-twitching, hissing, growling, chasing, fleeing and swatting. However, more subtle signals can sometimes be missed. These include stalking, staring, avoiding eye contact, blocking hallways or doorways, guarding food dishes or litter boxes and leaving the room when the other cat enters. If tension exists between cats, they often learn to avoid each other. They may also suppress their own natural behaviours (such as eating or toileting) in order to avoid direct conflict.

It is important to remember that, in the wild, cats can choose the company they keep and how much interaction to

Though cats do not accept roommates as easily as dogs do, creating an environment that provides them with plenty of choice can help.

and distribution of resources around the house, including food dishes, water bowls, litter boxes, perching spots, hiding places, scratching posts, beds and toys. It is best to have one resource per cat plus one extra. The resources should be separated from each other so that both cats can choose to engage in the same activity at the same time without feeling threatened.

In addition to a suitable environment, cats need to be properly introduced at the very beginning, which takes time and patience. Should you feel ready to bring a second feline friend into your home, check out sPCA.bc.ca/faqs/how-introduce-new-cat-old-cat for some additional tips.

How can I keep mice and rats out of my house?

As winter approaches and colder temperatures set in, rodents will be looking for a warm place to take shelter – sometimes finding it in our homes!

The best way to address mouse and rat problems is to prevent them before they start. Rodent-proof your home with these four simple steps:

1 Remove attractants. Like us, rodents need three basic things to survive – food, water and shelter. Try to remove as

“ If tension exists between cats, they often learn to avoid each other. They may also suppress their own natural behaviours (such as eating or toileting) in order to avoid direct conflict.

have with other cats. However, in our homes, these choices are often made for them. Thus, it is our responsibility to set cat-to-cat relationships up for success by creating an environment that helps them feel as safe and comfortable as possible.

This requires an adequate number

The best way to address mouse and rat problems is to prevent them before they start.



ASK THE SPCA

many of these as possible to make your home less attractive to them. Eliminate clutter and overgrown plants, which make convenient hiding spots close to your house. Keep food – including pet food – indoors in tight-fitting containers, and clean up messes and spills right away.

2 Find entry points. Mice can enter holes as small as the size of a dime. If you can fit your finger in it, chances are a mouse can fit too! Start by inspecting the outside of your home from the ground up. Look for any holes, gaps or open vents – especially gaps under doors. Inside, make sure to pull out large appliances and furniture from the wall, and check where pipes and wires come through the wall.

3 Exclude and repair. Once you find all the possible holes, it's time to seal them up. Use metal mesh to stuff into holes around pipes or wires, heavy-gauge wire screening to cover holes, and expanding-foam sealant to help fill other gaps and cracks. If needed, use rodent-proof door sweeps and vent covers to close off those gaps.

4 Maintain, maintain, maintain! Rodents have large, strong front teeth that can chew through almost anything – even metal. Check your home regularly for any signs of gnawing or droppings, and make repairs quickly.

For more tips, or to find an AnimalKind-accredited wildlife control company to help you deal with rodent issues humanely, visit animalkind.ca.

Help! I'm at my wit's end with my dog chewing everything. We're on our third TV remote!

All dogs' first exploration of their world is with their mouths. Puppies, especially in the first six months, taste, touch and feel different objects with their mouths – it is a normal, natural dog



Restrict access to things like electrical cords, as well as small items like pens, children's toys, slippers, shoes and TV remotes, to chew-proof your home.

behaviour. Puppies also chew to alleviate discomfort as their adult teeth come in, not unlike human babies. Exploratory chewing usually wanes as your dog moves into adulthood, but many dogs continue chewing for their whole lives.

Chewing is a pleasurable experience for many canines. It builds jaw strength, keeps teeth clean and is rewarding. Many dogs take great satisfaction in tearing something apart – like a dog bed, stuffed toy or your favourite shoes.

Chewing can also be comforting to dogs when left alone. This is why Fido may seek out one of your shoes, slippers or socks – these items have your scent. It's also a way to alleviate boredom and cope with the anxiety of being left alone. Increasing walks and playtime can reduce "boredom chewing."

Of course, the best way to prevent a dog from chewing unintended items is to "chew-proof" your home. Restrict access to things like electrical cords, as well as small items like pens, children's toys, slippers, shoes and TV remotes.

It's important to ensure your dog has a range of toys with different textures, sizes and even flavours. Choose a few high-quality toys that are strong – hard rubber and rope – and don't have small pieces that easily break off and get ingested. When you see toys are breaking or tearing, replace them.



Avoid hard plastic toys, sticks, antlers and cooked bones that can break teeth or easily splinter into sharp shards. Also, avoid rawhides which may seem "natural" but are anything but. They are produced using toxic chemicals with trace amounts remaining in the final product. They are also indigestible. Vets routinely treat dogs with intestinal blockages who have swallowed rawhides.

When you see your furry pal has grabbed something he shouldn't, don't yell but rather calmly bring a treat and an appropriate toy and practice a "drop, treat and switch" sequence. Redirecting your dog's attention while you substitute a more appropriate chew item – a squishy rubber toy or ball – is key to your dog learning what is theirs and what is not. To reinforce the connection, whenever you see them grab a proper toy, praise and treat. They'll catch on quickly that good things happen when they play with their own toys. ■

The new head of UBC's Animal Welfare Program (and lifelong dog lover) Dr. Alexandra Protopopova takes over BC SPCA's Applied Knowledge column from Dr. David Fraser.

Taking the REINS

APPLIED **KNOWLEDGE**

by Dr. Alexandra (Sasha) Protopopova



My name is Dr. Sasha, and I am your new source of updates from the University of British Columbia's Animal Welfare Program. Taking over this column from the great scientist and thinker, Dr. David Fraser, is frightening but also exciting. While I cannot promise to match David's wit nor depth of analysis, I am excited to continue the tradition of speaking directly to you about our latest research and concerns within the complex world of animal welfare.

First, a bit about me: I love dogs. My love of dogs took me to the shelter to conduct research on improving housing and adoption of dogs who are in need of homes (the subject of my PhD thesis in Behaviour Analysis from the University of Florida). While there, I developed an appreciation for how difficult it is to care for animals inside shelters, as well as a realization that improving animal welfare involves improving human well-being in our society; as the unofficial slogan of the UBC Farm wisely says, "No one thing does just one thing." All things are connected – something very true also in animal welfare.

But really, it was my love of animal behaviour that ultimately led me to my current position as an assistant professor and a BC SPCA/NSERC Industrial Research Chair in the Animal Welfare Program at UBC. Inspired by the books of Jane Goodall, observing apes in faraway corners of the jungle was one of my life goals. However, I realized that the study of behaviour could be done much closer to home – in fact, in our own homes, with our own companion animals.

There are currently many scholars who are working on exciting research projects within companion animal welfare at the UBC Animal Welfare Program. Bailey Eagan, a PhD student, is focused on improving housing conditions and rehabilitation programs for cats in animal shelters. Dr. Amin Azadian, a PhD student and a veterinarian in his home country of Iran, is focused on individual differences in learning in dogs. Lexis Ly, a PhD student, is working on improving the use of animal shelter data to better community services. Antonio Hou, an MSc student, is working on identifying individual preferences for human enrichment in shelter-housed dogs. Kai von Rentzell, an

MSc student, is finishing up his work exploring the intricacies of foreign dog rescue. We have also now welcomed Dr. Camila Cavalli, a postdoctoral fellow, who will be focusing on the topic of assistance dog welfare. Finally, we are currently hosting a guest researcher and veterinarian from Poland, Dr. Julia Miller, to study the effect of positive mood on learning in dogs.

In the columns to come, I will be highlighting these projects in greater detail. I hope you join me in this exploration of how we can make the world a better place for our companion animals, and for people who take care of them. ■



Dr. Alexandra Protopopova is the BC SPCA Chair in Companion Animal Welfare in the UBC Animal Welfare Program. The program, initiated in 1997 by the BC SPCA and other community partners, works to improve the welfare of animals through "research, education and public outreach."



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