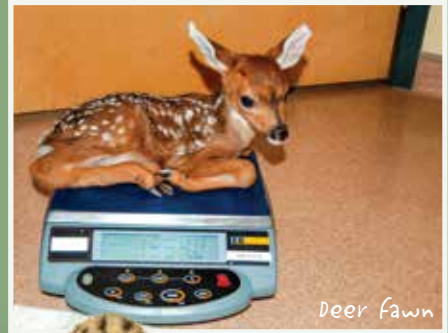




Pelican



Raccoon kit



Deer fawn



Owllet



Gull chick



Merganser duckling

# Want to rescue wildlife when you grow up?

**We asked Christina Carrières, senior wildlife rehabilitator at the BC SPCA Wild Animal Rehabilitation Centre (Wild ARC) on Vancouver Island, what it takes to care for orphaned and injured wildlife.**

What made you want to work for the BC SPCA?

Wildlife rehabilitation was intriguing to me. I was also inspired by the BC SPCA's high standards of care and animal welfare, and the dedication of the staff and volunteers. There are so many people with a passion for animals. It's a positive environment with like-minded people.

Are there any animals who have made a special impression on you?

There have always been animals in my life. Growing up, I had cats, mice, hamsters and even turtles. But it was the wildlife in my backyard – the red-winged blackbirds singing to signal the arrival of spring, and the antics of the young raccoons – who really caught my interest. Now I treat about 130 different species at work every year!



Christina examines a northern flicker.

Can you tell us a little about your professional background?

I transferred from pre-veterinary studies at college to a veterinary technician program. I hoped to eventually become a veterinarian. But, after graduating as a registered veterinary technician (RVT), I decided to go into biology and environmental studies at university instead. When I moved to British Columbia from Québec, I worked as an RVT in a few veterinary clinics

before applying for a position as a wildlife rehabilitator at Wild ARC.

What's your favourite part of your job?

Having the opportunity to learn something new every single day. Whether it's a better way to help the wildlife in my care, a fact about their natural history or a technique that increases their chances of survival, there's always more to learn!

Is there one case that sticks out in your mind?

Last summer, a young cedar waxwing arrived at the centre with a broken beak. Birds with beak injuries are difficult to treat because they're constantly using their beaks. So we had to get creative! I designed a splint made out of plastic x-ray film. I cut it to fit his beak and attached it with sutures. The bird was anaesthetized for this



Caring for wildlife is very different from caring for pets. Christina says it's important to limit human contact with wild animals so they can be released back into the wild. They need to be able to survive on their own without help from people.



Hummingbird fledgling

Swallows are Christina's favourite wild animal. She says they're especially challenging to care for because they need to be able to catch insects while flying to survive in the wild.

PHOTO: BARRY HETSCHKO

procedure, so he didn't feel a thing. With the splint, he could still open his beak normally. Fortunately, birds heal much more quickly than mammals, and in a few weeks we removed the splint and his beak was solid enough for him to eat on his own. This case stands out for me because



Cedar waxwing

we really had to think outside the box to come up with a solution to help the bird recover. Our ingenuity saved the bird's life, and gave us another tool to help future patients.

**What is the most unusual animal you've helped?**

I helped rescue a stranded harbour porpoise in Esquimalt. We had to transfer him to Marine Mammal Rescue in Vancouver. We kept him hydrated on the long, cold overnight trip by regularly pouring fresh seawater on his back. I felt like I played porpoise paramedic!

**What keeps you excited to do your job every day?**  
The fact that I can never predict what situations are going to arise. New patients arrive, and there are new situations to deal with and new challenges to overcome. Every chance I get to return injured or orphaned animals to their wild home feels like I'm able to make up for some of the negative impacts of human activity.

**What is one piece of advice you would give to kids who**

**want to make a difference for animals?**  
Start with being aware of the impact of your actions and minimizing your own footprint in the world. We're all part of the larger web of life, and there's so much we can do to improve the well-being of our fellow wild creatures. Whether it's protecting their environment or bringing injured animals to a wildlife rehabilitation centre, these actions matter. Become an ambassador for wildlife!

## Your career path... to becoming a BC SPCA wildlife rehabilitator

- ✓ Graduate high school
- ✓ Post-secondary school (preferred)
- ✓ Communication and organizational skills
- ✓ Wildlife rehabilitation courses and workshops
- ✓ Knowledge of wildlife and the environment
- ✓ Volunteer experience with wildlife
- ✓ Good physical fitness
- ✓ B.C. driver's license
- ✓ Animal care skills



Mallard duckling