

WRCNU Buys Land, Plans State-of-the Art Facility to Rescue Wildlife

Hopefully — once the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Northern Utah moves into its “forever home” — no other healthy juvenile beaver will be denied the chance to spend its lifetime in the wild.

“We saved her life,” Marthaler says sadly, “but she lost her freedom.”

When the nonprofit WRC was suddenly displaced in spring 2023 by plans for expansion and additional parking at neighboring Dinosaur Park in Ogden, an orphaned beaver at the rehab facility was trapped in an unfortunate circumstance.

The temporary quarters for the WRC, in a 100-year-old house and small business building on Ogden’s Washington Boulevard, wasn’t large enough nor equipped to accommodate aquatic animals like the water-loving beaver. And the animal was too young to be successfully released into the wild.

So executive director DaLyn Marthaler was forced to find a facility willing to take on the beaver as a permanent resident. Fortunately, an entity stepped up to assist in placement.

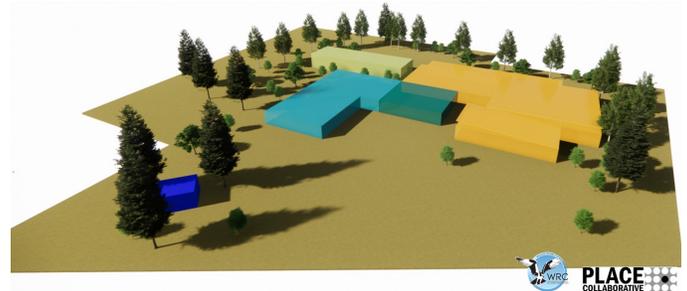
“We saved her life,” Marthaler says sadly, “but she lost her freedom.”

And WRC is all about freedom. The 15-year-old center’s mission is to treat sick or injured wildlife and return the animals to the wild. The nonprofit managed to keep a thread of the operation alive by moving into the much smaller house/commercial building and relocating its education

ambassador animals (like Gus the turkey vulture and Phoenix the golden eagle) into former overflow mews on the Marthalers’ property.

But now, hopes and dreams spring anew.

The WRC this summer bought 2.89 acres of open land along U.S. 89 in Harrisville (west across the highway from the Ben Lomond Animal Clinic), where the organization plans to construct a building specifically designed to heal wildlife. And the temporary Ogden facility — which is costing \$70,000 and counting for work such as repairing leaks and water damage and cleaning up mold — finally reopened to new animal intakes on October 21. (*“Forever Home” continued on next page*)



Conceptual layout of the future WRCNU hospital and Education Center

IMPRINTED CROW NAMED BLING SOON HEADED TO THE BRONX ZOO

Bling doesn’t know *who* he is.

He doesn’t remember being around those who look like him. He spends his days in a large cage, jumping from one flat surface to another, amusing himself by throwing a miniature wiffle ball into a bowl of water and pulling it back out. He finds a small rock and drops it in the water. He cocks his handsome coal-black head curiously at a stranger sitting across the room. He seems never to be still.

The young American crow is an imprint, meaning he was separated from his family before he gained his sense of self. Now 4-5 months old, he identifies with the humans who come to his cage to make sure he is fed and healthy.

If he suddenly were released among crows again, he would not recognize them. He would be baffled and stressed. And so would they. (*“Bling” is continued on page 4*)



Our latest Financial Audit & our last three IRS 990 Tax Returns are always available on-line for your inspection.

Go to our website’s “ABOUT US” page under “Documents”.

WWW.WRCNU.ORG

Mailing Address: 3127 N Pelican Dr / Farr West, UT 84404 / www.WRCNU.org

WRCNU Buys Land, Plans State-of-the Art Facility to Rescue Wildlife (Cont. from page 1)



Above is a conceptual depiction of many dreams. The final plan is a ways from its infancy and with community help it will spring to life!

The very best thing about the new development? “For me, simply the single best feature will be WRCNU being self-reliant, living on its own property,” says Buz Marthaler, WRC board chairman (and spouse of DaLyn), “and knowing that the only things that can displace us would be having a freeway going through the property or an environmental disaster — earthquake, tornado, etc. We will be in our Forever Home.”

That’s huge, but the advantages hardly stop there. The WRC is working with the Park City architectural firm Place Collaborative to bring the dream to life. Among the anticipated features of the future building:

- At least 15,000 square feet of building space, compared to about 10,000 square feet at the old facility, which was converted from a retired animal shelter.
- About 2/3 of that space will be devoted to medical use, and the rest for educational purposes, such as natural history displays and presentations to schoolchildren and others about responsible stewardship of wildlife and habitat.
- A network of trails and native plantings surrounding the building, to move the educational sessions outdoors as much as possible and to illustrate how birds and other animals use such native plants. DaLyn was delighted at the architects’ suggestion to sell seeds for native plants in the center’s gift shop. “That would encourage people to plant native plants,” she says, meshing perfectly with the WRC focus on environmental sustainability.
- A one-way window concept to allow visitors to observe activity in the baby bird room without being invasive.
- State-of-the-art facilities that allow WRC to resume the rescue of beavers, otters, pelicans, ducks, badgers, bobcats and more. As mentioned, the temporary facility cannot handle those larger animals.
- Addition of a strong internship program in association with the veterinary school at Utah State University.

Buz envisions a day when the WRC can add a veterinarian to the staff, rather than transporting animals to a vet’s office when necessary. “People will be knocking down our doors to be a part of us,” he predicts.

Until then, the hard work is far from over. *(Cont. on next page)*

The more than \$400,000 cost of the Harrisville property drained the WRC coffers, leaving enough to sustain the day-to-day work but little else. The organization took out a loan for the Washington Boulevard property. That means the WRC soon will be mounting a major fundraising campaign for its future new facility. Buz admits he has no idea about the cost, but he expects to shoot for at least \$2 million. Such campaigns often require five years to fruition.

Perhaps, he ventures, the building could be completed in phases, obviously starting with the medical component first to get things moving.

“The current facility is nothing more than an expensive ‘survival tool,’” Buz laments. “Without it, we would already be done; gone. ... This facility is nothing more than a Band-Aid fix; one that I cannot wait to rip off!”

-- By Vanessa Zimmer

Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Northern Utah



We are far from a “solid plan”, but are very excited as we engage with Place Collaboration LLC planners!

Currently we are looking (above) at the Animal Hospital side being around 7,500 sq ft, not counting the outdoor enclosures. The animal hospital will provide areas for separation of raptors, passerines, mammals and aquatics along with an intake lobby and quarantine rooms.

The Education Center plan is to have classroom space for presentations, events, and training with an attached Museum and gift shop. Adjacent to the education side is an outdoor area (Wild Site) with natural plantings, educational signage, and pathways as well as display enclosures for public viewing of our ambassadors.



“He’s not going to talk like a crow,” says Jen Runsvold, who tends him. “He’s not going to act like a crow.”

The residents of a Utah neighborhood somehow adopted Bling from the wild as a young fledgling this spring or summer, before his crow family taught him how to hunt for food. He could fly around the area but quickly learned the humans were his source of food.

This is obviously not the best scenario for a crow, no more than for a human baby to be raised by wolves. But Bling is lucky, or as lucky as an imprinted crow can be.

He has “landed” at the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Northern Utah in Ogden. And Runsvold, a wildlife rehabber at the center, is intent on preparing him for the best life possible outside of living in a murder of crows back in nature.

Which means Bling is in training. He is learning “stationing,” so that when Runsvold says “Perch,” he immediately hops to the branch that runs through his cage and sits there calmly. “Yes,” Runsvold assures him and

hands him a mealworm treat (Bling’s favorite). Stationing is important, for example, so that Bling can hop to a scale and be weighed to make sure he is maintaining a healthy weight. Grabbing a bird, even when done properly, can be alarming and scary for the bird. Again, that word: stressful.

Runsvold is also teaching Bling to touch his beak to a target stick, in this case, a plastic tube with a sparkly blue ball at the end. “Here,” she says, thrusting the stick behind Bling. He turns and touches his beak to the ball. Another mealworm treat. “Here,” to the side. Beak to ball. Mealworm. “Here,” to the other side. Beak to ball. Mealworm.

The idea is to use the targeting technique to prompt Bling to move calmly from area to area. For example, into a small crate so that he can be transported safely, as when he leaves Ogden for a new home at the Bronx Zoo when the time is right.

At some point in life, crows become neophobic, meaning they are afraid of new things. So Runsvold spends time introducing new stuff – a large rock, for example, a gloved hand (like the ones that might need to reach for him), and the aforementioned crate – to Bling. The hope is to minimize some of that neophobia.

Since an imprinted bird like Bling would likely die if returned to the wild, the WRCNU sought placement for him. The famous Bronx Zoo has agreed to take him. There, Bling will appear in educational displays and classroom visits -- maybe even in an “Animal Planet” episode, as have some of his WRCNU predecessors, two ospreys, a marmot, a golden eagle, and a bald eagle.

Most important of all, he will be safe. Runsvold is optimistic for Bling’s future. Crows are famously smart, with the intelligence level of a 7-year-old child. They are often called “feathered apes,” Runsvold says, because of their intelligence.

She tries to keep him entertained and stimulated with the training and with puzzle toys. A stimulated crow is a happy crow, she believes. An unstimulated and unhappy crow becomes self-destructive, plucking out its own feathers.

When Runsvold comes into the center each morning, Bling seems excited to see her. “He talks to me. He wants attention. He wants to tell me about his night.” Sort of like a puppy dog, but not. Bling is *not* a pet.

Runsvold wants to send Bling off with the best tools so he can cope with life as an imprint.

“He’s going to a great place,” says Runsvold.

“I just want him to be OK.”

ABOUT BLING, AND HIS NAME

Bling is named for his “bling,” the blue bands around each leg that he wore when he arrived this summer at the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Northern Utah. It isn’t known who placed the bands on his feet, but WRCNU staff suspect it was for identification/ownership purposes.



With the command, “Perch!”, Bling flies to a perch in his enclosure.



OPEN AGAIN! A Note From the Directors



We are thrilled to announce that our doors are open once again, and we're grateful to hear our phones ringing with familiar voices on the other end. Since our reopening, many of the calls have been about wildlife in need—animals that require the dedicated care we strive to provide. Just as many calls, however, are from friends and supporters simply sharing their excitement about our return. Hearing the community's joy has meant the world to us, reminding us that our work goes beyond healing animals; it connects us to all of you.

This reopening is a victory and the close of a chapter, but it's far from the end of our journey. We're still working tirelessly toward our ultimate goal: building a permanent home on our new property. This vision will allow us to care for every species we've supported in the past and continue expanding our capacity to serve wildlife across Northern Utah. Every day, we're reminded of how much more we can do with your support.

With gratitude for everyone who has helped us come this far, we humbly ask for continued donations. Whether you're a long-time donor or considering joining us, your generosity directly contributes to the future of wildlife in Utah. Together, we can make this next chapter even more meaningful for the animals we protect and the community we cherish.



Thank you for standing by us. ~ Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Northern Utah Board of Directors ~



Ogden's Harvest Moon Festival



IRS CFC Charity Event



Right: Urban Flea Market



A WRCNU 2024 Charity Sponsor: Women's Wine Hiking Society, LLC



Northern Utah Trailfest

Rhett Skinner Joins the WRCNU Staff

Rhett Skinner's parents began urging him to get involved in after-school activities when he was a teenager.

Sports didn't interest him. Nor did school groups like the chess club. He tried Future Farmers of America for a year and, although he liked interacting with animals, the farming part didn't appeal to him at all.

He checked out the Ogden Nature Center, but volunteer work there seemed to revolve around weeding and helping in the classrooms. When the ONC folks learned he was interested in animals, they suggested the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center — which he'd never heard of.



Left: Rhett Holding a new Red-tailed Patient. Right: Rhett restrains a Common Raven being treated for Avian Pox. (*Avian Pox is treatable and with supportive care the patient can expect to fully recover.*)

But, at age 15 or so, he began volunteering at the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. "I just put my head down and did the work," says the now-20-year-old, who became a part-time staff member late this summer.

He was the kind of guy who was anxious in new places and around new people. But he did like animals, and it wasn't long before he started noticing things. Cleaning out a cage, he was surprised by the tall, slim resident bird's orange and red feathers. "Oh my god, what is this bird?" he wondered. It was a northern flicker, he learned.

Then he met Gus the turkey vulture, a permanent resident who serves as one of the WRC's education ambassadors. Who would have believed a vulture could be so attractive? "Seeing one up close, it's surprising how cool and pretty they are," says Skinner. He would go into Gus' enclosure and place a dead rat on the perch for the bird's dinner. "He'd just be chill with you," he says. Skinner would sit silently, and they would watch each other.

The birds' personalities soon became recognizable to him.

Sweet Girl the bald eagle lived up to her name. Bug, another bald eagle, was altogether different: "He tries to intimidate you, to scare you, and then he'd laugh at you."

Skinner learns more every day. He's getting comfortable around the larger birds, which can't be picked up with a simple body grab. He grabs the legs with one hand and lifts, tucking the wings under with the other hand. "After the first time, it became a lot easier," the North Ogden resident says.

Once, during his volunteering days, he was assigned to release a rehabbed crow near a local neighborhood. Skinner opened the cage door, the bird immediately ducked out and flew to a nearby tree. The crow sat there a bit, looking around. "And then he just flew off," says Skinner, with just a bit of awe in his voice.

"I think it's a good fit for me," Skinner says of the WRC position. "It makes it so I don't mind the boring cleanup stuff," like changing the birds' bedding and laundering it.

He has completed two semesters at Weber State University. He declared his major in computer science, a field that comes easy for him, and a minor in either zoology or biology. "But I might switch them."

"The more I stay, here, the more I wouldn't mind staying here," he confesses.

"It's feeling like I'm doing something, helping birds."

-- Vanessa Zimmer



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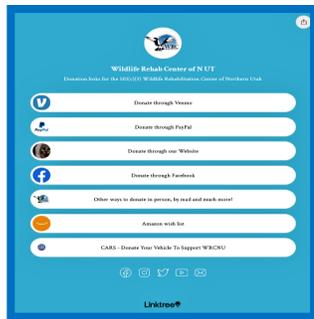
About the writer:

All three articles in this newsletter were written by a relatively new WRCNU volunteer, Vanessa Zimmer.

Vanessa is a career writer and editor whose roles have included associate editorial manager for the Sundance Institute, assistant editor at *Utah Life* magazine, and features editor at the *Standard-Examiner* newspaper, where she created the *GO!* entertainment publication, and *Wasatch View* lifestyle magazine.

We consider Vanessa a great asset to our Team!

Your End of Year Support is Extremely Important to Us



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No matter how big or small, your donation makes a HUGE IMPACT!



There are many ways to support Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Northern Utah and all are greatly appreciated.

- 1) **Monthly Sustainers:** The “WRCNU Sustainer Team” continues to grow—WELCOME to our new members!. These members understand that they really don’t miss the automatic monthly donations coming out of their credit/debit cards OR from their checking/savings account through their monthly “Bill Pay”. Visit our Donate tab’s *“Become a Sustainer”* page for more information on becoming a *“WRCNU Sustainer”*.
- 2) **Donate your old vehicles** (cars/trucks/scooters/motorcycles/boats/RVs/etc.) through our partner CARS nonprofit. **No cost to you**, CARS schedules and does all the “heavy lifting” and provides a Tax Deductible receipt for your donation and sends WRCNU a nice check. See our link to the CARS donation form on our website’s “Donate” tab (scroll towards the bottom of the page).
- 3) **Employer Matching**—many Businesses will double your gifts by matching your donations; Ask your employer if they have a Matching Gift Program. If WRCNU does not already have a program with your employer, it’s still pretty easy. They will contact us by email and we will gladly enroll for the opportunity to double your gifts.
- 4) **Mailed Donations:** Checks should be mailed to our mail only address at **3127 N Pelican Dr., Farr West, UT 84404**
- 5) **In-Kind Donations:** Go to our Website’s *donate page* at wrcnu.org/donate, scroll down to our **Amazon Wishlist** link
- 6) **Smith’s Market “Inspiring Donations”:** If you have a Smith’s Rewards Card, why not link your grocery shopping to your favorite charity using WRCNU’s Reward Code PA360. Once signed up, it costs you nothing; Smith’s donates based on your spending.
- 7) **Combined Federal Campaign (CFC):** Our **CFC Charity Code is 74219** We cherish our federal workers (Military & Civilian). Ask your CFC Rep. how to donate through Payroll deduction now that the campaign is in full swing for the 2025 season.

8) **Venmo:**

9) **PayPal:**



WRCNU1



venmo



Previously known as GuideStar

Meet Gus, WRCNU's Newest Ambassador!



Gus, a Turkey Vulture, is the most recent addition to our group of Wildlife Education Ambassadors here at WRCNU.

Gus is not truly "new" to WRCNU, we met him 10 years ago as a juvenile. Gus was an illegal passenger in someone's vehicle when DWR got wind of this unauthorized possession--short story, Gus was confiscated and ended up at our Center.

Gus was in poor condition, having been fed "fast food" and other inappropriate meals and it was evident that he had become imprinted on humans. By federal law, it is illegal to release imprinted animals back into

the wild as it is not fair to the animal and, depending on the animal, could be a danger to humans. Gus was approved for another educator's program, but was "offered as excess" on their permits last year so WRCNU "Snatched him up!"

Gus is an amazing, chill, Ambassador and definitely a big crowd pleaser.

Note: Turkey Vultures are a migratory species to Utah and migrate as far north as southern Canada during the breeding season and return south for the winter to coastal California, southeastern US, and Mexico.



WRCNU Ambassador "Margaret" is an imprinted Red-tailed Hawk. Margaret is approximately 17 years old and as feisty and beautiful as ever.



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