Avian Haven Featured Cases Winter Spring 2011

Avian Haven

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Featured Cases
Winter into Spring
2011
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Photos by Glori Berry unless otherwise noted
(DW = Diane Winn)
Case #s: Multiple

Mallards

Admitted Nov. 27, 2010 - Feb. 23, 2011
Species Profile

Mallards are the most abundant and perhaps the most familiar ducks of North America. Despite being heavily hunted, populations have remained stable.

Males (known as drakes) are distinguished by their green heads, white neck-rings, chestnut breasts, grayish bodies, and black tail-curls. Females (hens) have streaks of white, tan, gray or black on brown feathers.

Foods vary with season; insects and aquatic invertebrates predominate in summer, while aquatic vegetation and cereal crops are more common in winter. Urban mallards may rely on bread or seeds.

Typical breeding areas are marshes and ponds. Mallards can winter wherever food and open water are available.
Case History and Notes

These birds had varied histories. The first bird in the series had been rescued from an iced-in pond; one wing had been severed at the wrist, most likely by gunshot.

Several were found following winter storms; they had no apparent injuries, but were thin and weak. Their poor body condition could be attributed at least in part to lack of food, but some also had heavy parasite loads. Their recovery involved treatment for parasites, and gains in weight and strength.

Another bird was found in a road and although no fractures or wounds were found, he had a number of missing flight feathers. Time for feather re-growth was needed. One final bird had been hit by a car and had a wing fracture.
This is the hen rescued in November. The circled joints are her wrists; note that the wing on the left has no “hand” bones. The round object in her shoulder area is most likely a shot-gun pellet. Unable to fly, she could not leave the breeding lake in the fall with her family.
Jan. 22: The car-hit bird has a fracture in the ulna, the larger of the two bones between the elbow and wrist. Although the break is close to the wrist, the joint itself is intact. This is the bird’s right wing.

He is settled in, his fracture having been stabilized with a wing wrap.
Jan 25: He’s feeling better.
Feb. 3: Physical Therapy
With the bird under anesthesia, the wing is carefully stretched, making sure there is good range of motion at the wrist joint.
Meanwhile, other mallards (the crippled hen and two drakes) are in an outdoor habitat.

Another bird shares this habitat with the ducks . . .
... a Canada Goose!
The Goose had been with us since Oct. of 2010. She had been unable to stand, and a back injury seemed likely. Her recovery was slow, but steady. By the first of the year, she was able to walk without stumbling, and in February, could fly short distances. These photos were taken in late January.
It was too cold in January to keep the in-ground pool filled with water. But large bowls of water were provided, and the Mallards were always enthusiastic about the chopped kale each morning.
Late February: A second hen Mallard has joined the group.

And the drakes are getting restless.
March 4: A hen and a drake are ready for release.

A tape band used to identify the drake is removed.
March 4 at the release site.

Photos by Amy Campbell
Who’s this?
You might think it’s another hen Mallard, but it’s actually a more recent arrival – a Black Duck admitted on Feb. 12 with wounds on her back.

Though somewhat similar in overall appearance, the two species can be distinguished by differences in a patch of blue feathers on the wing known as the “speculum.” The Mallard (top right) has white borders around the blue. The Black Duck’s speculum (bottom right) lacks the white borders.
Waterfowl biologists are studying winter survival rates in Black Ducks; when our bird is ready to go, she is examined and banded.

Notice the divot in the bill; it may have been caused by gunshot.
March 25: One of the drake Mallards accompanies the Black Duck to a release site.

He leaves the box, then flies off, heading up river.

Photos by Kelsey Sullivan
The Black Duck leaves the transport box . . .

. . . and flies in a different direction, toward a cove where she will join other Black Ducks.

Photos by Kelsey Sullivan
After the previous releases, only the crippled hen and the drake with the wing fracture remain. We’ve been able to keep the pool filled, and these birds continue to enjoy their swim time. The two mallards are inseparable.
We’ve arranged a home for the hen at the Maine Wildlife Park. The interlocking ponds there are spring fed, and there is open water year-round. The Park’s resident Mallards are often joined by wild birds; all are free to come and go. We don’t want to separate the drake from the hen, so arrange to release him at the Park’s ponds when she is taken there on April 7.
The Canada Goose is flying! She has already tipped a couple of her flight feathers, and is ready to go. Along with another Canada Goose that has been in rehab at another facility, she is released at a private pond, also on April 7.
Case # 40

Red-tailed Hawk

Admitted Feb. 1
Species Profile

“Red-tails” are one of the most widespread raptors in North America. They can be found year-round in Maine. Their common name comes from the russet color of the adult’s tail (juveniles have pale brown tails).

Red-tails like open areas with high places to perch while searching for prey. Favorite food items are mammals such as mice, rats, and squirrels. Prey captured by the hawk’s talons may bite the bird’s toes in an attempt to escape; many birds have healed wounds from these struggles.
Case History and Notes

This bird had been preying on domestic chickens – most likely out of desperation, for her left leg was broken, and normal hunting would have been difficult. She was brought here on Feb. 1, having been captured the previous evening.

In addition to the broken leg, the bird had a heavy load of intestinal parasites – four different kinds! They were treated a few days after her arrival.

Finally, the hawk had a “war wound” – her right medial toe is missing its talon, most likely the result of a struggle with prey, as described on the previous slide.

The cause of the fracture was unknown.
Feb. 6: the leg is x-rayed; the wound at the fracture site is checked, cleaned and bandaged; and the leg splinted and wrapped.
Feb. 9: The hawk is housed in a carrier too small for much movement; we want her to stay quiet, but she can still stretch her wings.
Viewer Discretion!

Did you notice something on the perch in that last photo? As previously indicated, small rodents are favorite foods of Red-tails.

In case you’re wondering, we don’t feed live mice. Our feeder mice have already been euthanized and frozen when we acquire them.

The next slide shows the Red-tail enjoying a meal – watch at your own risk (or skip to slide 31)!
Progress Reports

The splint was removed on Feb. 17, and a few days later, the bird was moved to an outside cage.
Feb. 22
But as enthusiastic as she had been about eating while indoors, she refused to eat outdoors unless hand fed. Also, the foot with the “war wound” had gotten scraped, possibly by ice on a perch. We brought her back in on Feb. 26, and by the next day, she was eating on her own again.

When she went back outside on March 8, we left a wrap on to protect the scuffed foot. From then on, she ate readily.
March 11: She’s getting restless.
March 12: Release Day

Photos by Terry Heitz
Photos by Terry Heitz
Case # 85

Red-tailed Hawk

Admitted March 29
Case History and Notes

Just over two weeks after the previous bird was released, we got a call about another Red-tail. This one was found on the ground unable to stand, possibly as a result of a back injury. The right leg could move slightly, but the left leg did not move at all, and the toes of both feet were clenched. We set him up on a pillow bed for the night, and he stayed there the next day.
He tried unsuccessfully to stand on his clenched feet. We opted to make him some “Birdenstocks” - padded, semi-rigid sandals to hold the toes open, in a normal position.
Back on his padded substrate, he stands for a short period, using his wings for balance. He even takes a few halting steps toward the food platter.

He manages to get there, but has to finish the meal sitting down.
Over the next week, he was able to stand for increasingly long periods of time. In order to keep tail feathers from breaking as he struggled to maintain balance, we applied a tail guard - a piece of x-ray film, cut to the shape of the tail, and held to the underside of the tail with (red) masking tape.
The footpads were removed on April 7. These photos, taken the following day, show him using his feet almost normally.

The right rear toe (hallux) tends to fold under the foot.
Some head shots ....
On April 10, the right hallux was taped in the proper position, and on the 12th, the bird was moved to an outdoor cage. After a week, the tape was removed, and the hallux remained where it belonged.
Release day was April 30.

Photos by Terry Heitz
Case # 82

Rock Pigeon

Admitted March 25
Species Profile

17th-century colonists brought domestic pigeons to their North American settlements. Feral descendents of these bird now are found throughout the continent. They do not migrate.

There are many plumage variations, but the typical color is a bluish gray, often with two dark wing bars. Foods are mostly seeds and agricultural foods such as peas, corn, barley.

Pigeons are known for their homing abilities. During WWI and WWII, they were used as military messengers, and some war pigeons were decorated as heroes for the lives their messages had saved.

The species nickname of “Superdove” reflects Pigeons’ extreme adaptability (read Courtney Humphries’ book by that name for more information).
Breeding

Pigeons are monogamous, and mate for life. They are able to breed year round in some parts of North America; here in Maine, the first young of the year hatch in very early spring. There are two eggs per brood.

This photo from our archives shows a newly-hatched pigeon next to its sibling’s egg, which is starting to hatch.

Their long yellow down is replaced by emerging feathers. Because of their relatively large beaks in proportion to their body size, nestling pigeons are commonly mistaken for other species, such as vultures or gulls.
Not a vulture!

This is a young Turkey Vulture.

Not a gull, either!

These are young Herring Gulls.
Case History and Notes

This half-grown youngster had been reported on the grounds of a hospital, and was rescued by a security guard (and was believed to be a “baby seagull”).

He was our first nestling of 2011! We started off by hand-feeding the baby, but . . . .

In 2010, an injured adult pigeon had adopted several of our nestlings. We still had him; he had since paired up with a fancy domestic pigeon that is also non-releasable. We wondered if they would adopt this youngster; to find out, we set them up together. The baby heads right for the fancy female, and she tolerates his close proximity.
Now the question is . . . will she feed the youngster? He clearly wants her to, but she’s still not sure.
But by later in the day, the baby’s bulging crop (a sort of food-storage pouch off the esophagus) lets us know that he’s been fed.
Both Pigeon parents feed, and because it had been the male who had been so attentive to our 2010 youngsters, we knew he was taking on some of the responsibilities.
As is the case with most bird species, pigeon parents feed by regurgitating food into the youngster’s mouth. However, unlike the typical feeding process, the young Pigeon puts its beak inside the parent’s wide-open mouth. Dad was observed feeding on April 6.
The youngster does get Mom’s attention; she grooms and preens.
A couple days later, Mom is observed feeding; this close-up shows how much of the youngster’s head is inside her mouth.

Junior then settles down with Dad.
April 12: The youngster is old enough now to self feed. Dad sets an example (left), and the juvenile soon follows suit (right).

The plumages of the two birds are now more similar. But the youngster lacks the white cere (patch of skin at the top of the beak) and the iridescence of the adult.
The next skill to master was flying. On April 16, Junior was on a perch only accessible by flight; that was our cue to move the family to an outdoor cage. He was up top with the adults in no time . . .

. . . and soon proceeded to show off his new wings.
On April 24, the youngster (along with his foster Mom and Dad) were moved into a large flight cage designed for this species. It already had several other inhabitants; here, the juvenile was introduced to other birds outside the “family.” In order for us to identify him, we applied colored plastic bands – black on the left leg, and red on the right.
He soon made new friends . . .

. . . and seemed to particularly like a cute little blond girl.
On May 1, his bands were removed, and he was returned to his home town (“Blondie” was released there along with him).
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To see more photos by Glori Berry, visit http://www.gloriberry.com/pics