

Oil Spill Exercise, Bald Eagle Foundation, Anchorage

Avian Specialty Veterinary Services of Alaska

By Scott L Ford, DVM, Dip. ABVP (Avian), August, 2008

www.alaskabirddoc.com / vet@alaskabirddoc.com

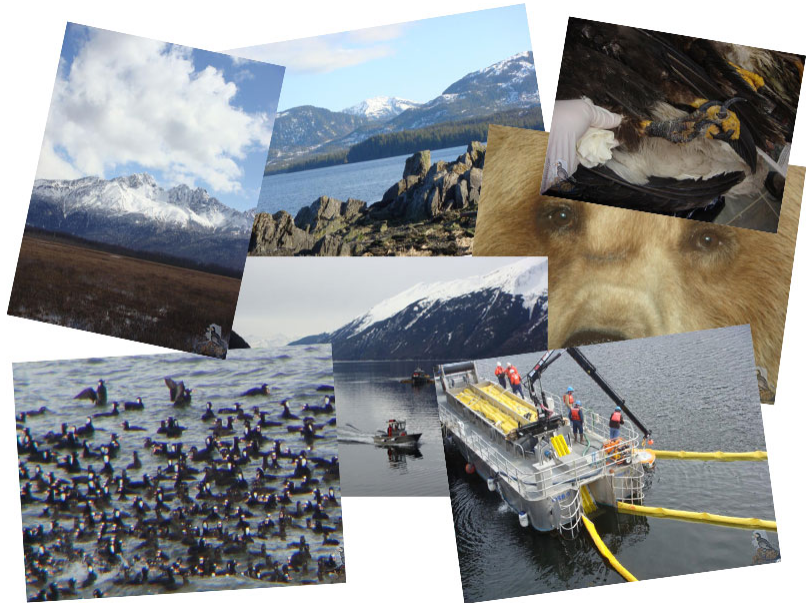


CLICK HERE FOR MORE PHOTOS

In April, 2009, I visited Ketchikan, Skagway, Haines, Anchorage, and Eagle River on various types of business. In Ketchikan, in cooperation with SEAPRO and Ketchikan Indian Communities, we instructed a class on basic wild bird medicine. Participants included local responders and volunteers from both organizations. It is hoped that the information will be helpful as injured birds are found in

the area quite regularly. Injured birds include waterfowl, ravens, crows, seabirds, and bald eagles. The birds are usually stabilized for a day or two and then sent to other wildlife centers for complete care. I also spent a day looking over the 10 captive raptors at KIC Tribal Fish Hatchery and Eagle Center. This facility entertains and educates thousands each summer and also puts on educational programs for local school-aged children the rest of the year. Captive birds include bald eagles, a peregrine falcon, great-horned owls, a golden eagle, red-tailed hawks, and a turkey vulture. Finally, I looked over a great-horned owl and a bald eagle from Rainforest Sanctuary, another display/educational bird facility located in Ketchikan.

Next, I journeyed to Skagway via Juneau. Since we were transporting a lot of equipment from Juneau and we needed a van to do it, we drove onto the ferry. It was a beautiful calm, sunny day in southeast Alaska. We saw a huge number of birds at the delta of Katzeihin River including trumpeter swans and marbled murrelets. The purpose of the Skagway trip was to participate in an area oil spill response exercise, which are held about once a year. On the first day we instructed a class on deterring wildlife from entering a spill zone, also known as "wildlife hazing." It was a day long class and included a live fire exercise of pyrotechnics. If you are interested in participating as a SEAPRO responder or otherwise taking this class when it is offered again, contact Cheryl Fultz (cheryl@seapro.org) at SEAPRO. The following days included a table-top simulation of a spill. During these simulations, we are given a scenario and we work under a structured Incident Command System (ICS) to communicate and put resources into play to contain and clean up the spill while addressing wildlife, environmental



impact, public safety, and other concerns. It's a lot of work so it's a good thing we do these drills from time to time to make sure things come off smoothly if it should ever be for real. Cheryl and I were able to scoot over to Dyea and do some birding. We saw trumpeter and tundra swans, surf scoters, common mergansers, mountain bluebirds, bald eagles, mallards, sea lions, harbor seals, mountain bluebirds, and the blue grouse were hooting up a storm. We even heard an American kestrel.

Next I traveled to Haines where I was honored to be a guest of the American Bald Eagle Foundation (ABEF). We discussed ways that SEAPRO and the ABEF could cooperate to improve care of local injured birds, have volunteers in place to respond to spills, and bring in wild bird care training opportunities to Haines. ABEF has grown incredibly during the past 19 years since I last saw their facility. They are just now finishing some exciting projects including mews for their first permanent captive birds at the facility. Dave Olerud, the founder of ABEF, hopes to have several species (including bald eagles, of course) permanently housed at the Center. Some of these birds will be capable of flight demonstrations. Dave's style of environmental education is unique. He has a great way of blending taxonomy (form) with function, habitat, food sources, and local culture and folklore so that the listener has a hard time missing the point that everything in the environment is interdependent-- none of it functions independently. I was invited up to speak at the upcoming Bald Eagle Festival. Cheryl and I also got in some awesome birding. We saw a huge flock of surf scoters plus harlequins, Barrow's goldeneyes, northern pintails, a harrier, and many more species. Special thanks to KA, Cheryl, and SEAPRO for putting this side trip together!

Finally, I flew back to Juneau and then up to Anchorage for a few days. Once again the Eric and Janice Peterson were generous hosts. They not only provided a place to stay but also the use of a car-- thank you!!! I was able to see 10 birds at Eagle River and perform a surgery at the Pet Emergency Trauma Center. Special thanks to Dr. Lorelei Cuthbert for helping so much in putting together the clinic visit.

I spent most of my last day with Bird TLC looking over several eagles and a hawk. I also performed a pinning surgery for an eagle with broken wing. Special thanks to Cindy Palmatier and the staff of Bird TLC for all you do for injured birds-- you are a great team!

Well, that's it for this trip. I am looking forward to the next trip in July, which will focus on Juneau, Anchorage and Eagle River. If you would like to know more about the organizations mentioned above or would like me to visit your town or talk over a case with your vet, please contact me at vet@alaskabirddoc.com.