



## The Bird Rescue Center of Sonoma County

*Restoring wings to the wild*

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On the anniversary of last year's devastating fires, we wanted to share with you the heroic efforts of our staff and volunteers that night last October. Told through the eyes of our Director of Avian Care, it was a harrowing experience – especially so because many of those fighting to save our birds knew they were, at the same time, losing their own homes. We are truly blessed to have folks like this here at The Bird Rescue Center.



*It was around 3am and our volunteers and staff were working frantically to capture and transport all our Resident Ambassador birds and hospital patients. We had no way of knowing when the fire might get too close for us to evacuate from the Chanate campus. While already being the darkest hours of the night, the air was also thick with smoke. Without my contacts or my glasses, I distinctly remember poking my head into an aviary, identifying the silhouette and then just going in for the grab. They weren't the most graceful captures that night, but we didn't need grace. We needed speed and efficiency.*



*In an emergency plan finalized just a month before, we determined the priority to be our resident birds first, then hospital birds, then food. Once our residents were safely packed, I moved through the hospital as quickly as possible. I remember grabbing a pair of scissors, putting on the gag gift my mom had sent me – a Disney Princess headlamp – and unlocking all the doors and gates. Our team began grabbing baskets containing songbirds as I started scooping up hospital raptors. With the hospital emptied, we moved on to the outdoor aviaries. Luckily, we had a small number of birds since baby bird season was over. Among them were a Turkey Vulture suffering from lead toxicity and a Great Horned Owl that had been scheduled for release the next evening.*

*This is where the scissors came in – I cut the creance bracelets off the owl and tossed it in the air as hard as I possibly could. It would be able to fly away faster than I was going to be able to drive it. Next came the vulture. After a stumbling chase around the bottom of its*

enclosure, it eventually landed in the carrier - it was a tight fit, but it would have to do.

With all the birds packed and loaded in vehicles, we made some quick decisions about food and medications. Then we ran out of time. While driving down the hill with ashes falling heavily around us, I was certain this would be the last time I would see the Quonset hut that had housed our facility for over 38 years.



Even though cell phone coverage was spotty and calls kept getting dropped, we were able to coordinate the next phase of the evacuation. Our resident birds would be housed at the home of two of our volunteers. Native Songbird Care and Conservation picked up all our songbirds and even agreed to shelter 2 owls from the hospital. Our ailing Turkey Vulture was transported to Sonoma County Wildlife.



Once it was daylight, our intrepid Administrative Assistant was on the move, taking back roads from Sebastopol to get to the Center. What a relief to get the text: 'We're still here!!' A Barn Owl and a Raven that had been left behind when it became too dark to see were found alive and transferred to Lindsay Wildlife Experience.



Over the course of the next week we continued to evacuate equipment, food and supplies. We also put out water and food to help support the wildlife that might be using our pocket of unburned area as a shelter.

When it was safe to return to the area, we reopened. We held more Visitor Days than usual so those in our community coping with loss could spend some time with our beautiful birds. It created a special bond just knowing our birds had been through the evacuations, just as they had. With the support of the community we were able continue helping the native wild birds as we have for the past 40 years.

Over a dozen of our beloved staff, volunteers, and associated veterinarians lost everything in that fire. As we hit this one-year mark, we are starting to see the process of rebuilding begin and are again hopeful for what the future holds. This past weekend, we had one of our largest Visitor Days ever. We, and all our birds, are so grateful for your kindness, love and support.

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## OPEN HOUSE

November 3rd, 2018  
from 10am - 1pm

3430 Chanate Road,

[More Information](#)



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**We are open from 9am to 5pm, 7 days a week.**

The Bird Rescue Center is 100% reliant on donations to fund our work. Every dollar makes a difference. Won't you help?

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