

Featured Creatures

THE BEAR NEWS

During recent months, the outside bear cage has been a den of activity. Cinnamon, the star bear of our last newsletter, finally reached the age of consent and was successfully released in a Northern California wilderness region. He was fat and healthy. Best of all, he was thoroughly wild; he never looked back at his caretakers as he charged off into freedom.

Soon after Cinnamon's departure, the Center played host to orphaned twin black bear cubs, a male and a female, three months old. They were en route to a larger facility out of state and stayed just long enough to be stabilized and readied for travel.

Currently, the bear cage is occupied by yet another bruin, a two-year old that came to us from Monterey. He is fit, smart, and nearly ready for release. Assistant Clinic Director Nicolette Heaphy notes that his wild instincts are keen and that he will do very well on his own.

The Center is one of only a few rehabilitation facilities equipped to raise and release large mammals. It is a great challenge to achieve success in the relatively new field of wildlife care. We are fortunate to have an outstanding and dedicated corps of staff and volunteers working together to serve the community and maintain our leading role.

Often, the Center has need of specialized services to improve its facility. Because of the bear cage's heavy use, we needed to strengthen the perimeter and replace the old metal den door and crank. We are extremely grateful to George Hayford for his time and carpentry skills given to renovating and reinforcing the cage.

Rick Urocochea, from R & S Erection of Marin, heard of our need to replace the battered den door and came to our rescue. Rick has visited and worked at the Center since he was a child and he fondly remembers Teddy the bear (who's still with us in another cage). Combining his time, talent, and tools, Rick fashioned a wonderful new door for the den. He even brought his family to visit the Center and inspect the work.

We are unbearably grateful to George and Rick for their voluntary efforts on behalf of the animals. Our bear enclosure, temporary home to healing creatures, is now a safer and better-equipped place.

VLADIMIR THE VULTURE

(Cathartes aura)
by Nicolette Heaphy

Allow me to introduce you to a constant but sometimes over-looked resident of the Marin Wildlife Center, our beloved vulture, Vladimir. When I first arrived at the Center in October, Vladimir had only been here a short while himself. (The picture shows how white and downy he was - quite a contrast to the dark, sleek feathers he now has.) He'd been recently transferred from another Wildlife Center, where he was raised from a chick, and was obviously too imprinted to be released. Our outdoor raven cage was the ideal solution for Vlad's housing. That way he was free to interact with lots of people (with whom he identifies more than he does with fellow vultures), and impress visitors with his enormous wing span and a face that only a mother could love.

His presence at the Center gives us the opportunity to see at close range the many adaptations that Turkey Vultures have acquired to survive successfully as carrion-eating raptors. The sharp, powerful beak is perfect for pulling meat off bone. The large, bridge-like nostrils (see photo) allow air flow which may carry the scent of a tasty meal. Then there's the head itself, which is bald to the neck to prevent a nasty mess of tangled and dirty feathers should it be necessary for the vulture to stick its head into a carcass in order to get that last, delicious bite. Vulture wings, held in the characteristic "V" shape when in flight, are long and powerful, allowing the creature to float from air current to air current, thereby conserving energy. Oh, I could go on and on! Suffice it to say that Turkey Vultures are amazing, complex and highly adapted creatures with a skillful ability to survive. They provide the invaluable service of removing decaying dead animals from our environment, thereby cutting down on disease. The next time you come to the Center, be sure to take a good, long look at Vladimir. You may be able to appreciate his ugly countenance just a little bit more.

