

S.O.A.R. event provides much needed funding

Second annual Bird-A-Thon set for May 8

By JENNIFER ENRIGHT

In a small white house located on Inkerman St. in Rockwood you'll find a unique clinic - one that's specifically dedicated to the rehabilitation of songbirds.

Known as Songbirds Only Avian Rehabilitation or S.O.A.R., the clinic began in 1992 and for more than a decade the not-for-profit group has been caring for orphaned, injured or sick songbirds from the Golden Triangle area.

Like many non-profit organizations, S.O.A.R. relies on volunteers and financial contributions from the public to survive as well as its annual fundraising event.

Judi Drake, S.O.A.R.'s president and

founder, says the clinic's major fundraising event on May 8 - the second annual Mother's Day Bird-A-Thon - will provide some much needed funding for the clinic which depends solely on public donations with no agency or government funding. Last year, the event raised \$1000 through pledges and Drake hopes S.O.A.R. can surpass that amount this year. "We are hoping to raise as much as we can. The money all goes back into food and supplies for the birds."

For Drake, the clinic is a labour of love and she's personally contributed much of her own money to keep S.O.A.R. running year after year. Initially back in the 1990s, she says she wanted to help out by volunteering with the

Guelph Humane Society but it quickly turned into something more than that and she opened her own clinic. "I got in touch with them (the Guelph Humane Society) and I thought I could handle small birds. I got hooked."

Nowadays, Drake essentially fulfills two roles: one a paid position as a self-employed accountant; the other a voluntary one as a dedicated volunteer and board member with S.O.A.R.

Drake says the clinic's coverage area is broad and the needs great. The clinic admits and provides licensed professional care to over 100 birds each year and they come from a variety of places - as far away as Collingwood or as close by as Terra Cotta or Orangeville.

In 2003, S.O.A.R. and its team of five volunteers cared for 146 songbirds and last year they looked after 100 birds. Drake says many of these birds arrived at S.O.A.R. after she received calls from the general public. But she also gets her share of referrals from veterinarians' offices and sometimes from the University of Guelph's Wild Bird Clinic. Last fall that clinic sent a Belted Kingfisher that was recovering from a fractured pelvis to S.O.A.R. After veterinarians assisted the bird at the University of Guelph, it spent four weeks recuperating at the Rockwood clinic eating a diet of minnows and living in a cage especially designed to restrict its movement. "These things do heal on their own providing they (birds) have the cage rest and the time," explains Drake.

Drake says a major part of S.O.A.R.'s role is caring for songbirds, but in addition to that the group also fulfills a role educating the public. Quite often, she says people mistakenly believe anyone can care for wildlife. S.O.A.R. is licensed by both the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the federal Ministry of

Environment's Canadian Wildlife Service to look after a variety of songbirds. "A lot of times, people don't find a rehabilitator in time or don't think to look for one. They think they are going to look after this bird themselves. They don't know there is a law against it."

S.O.A.R. can assist a variety of birds - even nestlings whose parents have been killed by a cat, says Drake. "We take in birds that fly into windows, get hit by cars, get bitten by cats, and sometimes birds that just fly into overhead wires and injure themselves."

Drake says the work is gratifying. Sometimes birds arrive at the clinic and they can't be saved and they die or are dead already. But for the most part there are success stories.

Anything over a success rate of 50 per cent is something Drake considers good, and as she notes S.O.A.R. has managed to go beyond that. "We average about 65 to 75 per cent."

Registration for the Mother's Day Bird-A-Thon begins at 8:30 a.m. on May 8 at the clinic. The clinic is located at 145 Inkerman St. Following the registration, there will be a walk in the Rockwood Conservation Area from 9 am until 11 am. Participants will meet at the clinic after the walk, where prizes will be handed out for the top three participating fundraisers, the top junior fundraiser (12 and under) and the top absentee fundraiser.

Pledge forms can be obtained from Wild Birds Unlimited located at 951 Gordon St., Unit 3 in Guelph, at Pamper Me Pet Supplies and Accessories at 4-178 Alma St. in Rockwood or at the clinic.

For more information or to donate prizes, contact S.O.A.R. at 519-856-4510. The fax number is 519-856-2847. The e-mail address is soar@sentex.net.



Submitted photo
This Brown Thrasher spent some time at S.O.A.R.'s offices in Rockwood recently. Each year, the charitable organization assists a wide variety of songbirds - including Blue Jays, Cedar Waxwings, Brown Creepers and many other birds. A large number of the birds are migratory and are seen in Canada between mid-May and mid-October.

PHOTO BY JENNIFER ENRIGHT

Judi Drake, president of Songbirds Only Avian Rehabilitation (S.O.A.R.) displays the indoor flight cage that she and other volunteers use to assist baby birds. Orphaned birds and other young birds learn to fly inside the cage without any assistance. "They start by hopping from one branch to another," explains Drake. "We have lower branches and higher ones so that gradually they work their way up to the higher branches. It doesn't take long; usually within one or two days they are flying."



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