

About the Wildlife Center

The Wildlife Center is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to the rehabilitation of California wildlife since 1967. It was initially permitted for Wildlife rehabilitation by the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) in 1987 and maintained active wildlife rehabilitation permits through 2000. The Wildlife Center was permitted to rehabilitate all native California wildlife species.

Dr. O'Leary first volunteered for the Wildlife Center in 1992 and took over the care and custody of the birds. These birds were used as foster parents for orphaned babies and educational animals for school group programs. In 2000 the wildlife rehabilitation program was temporarily halted. The President of the Wildlife Center, Diana Sieberns, was moving out of California and Dr. O'Leary needed time to reorganize.

In December of 2000, around the time Dr. O'Leary was renewing the Game Bird Permit with the California Department of Fish and Game, she called the DFG San Diego Office and talked to the warden in charge. Dr. O'Leary told him that she was going to temporarily halt wildlife rehabilitation and asked him what needed to be done to keep the permanently disabled birds that had been cared for at the Wildlife Center since the 1980s. The DFG official told Dr. O'Leary that she did not have to do anything since there was an Amnesty Program in effect. This meant that the Wildlife Center would have to stop its educational programs and not take in any additional wildlife. Dr. O'Leary agreed, believing the matter was settled, however, unfortunately, the Amnesty Program ended in November 2001. Dr. O'Leary never received notification that the program had ended and that she would need to get Restricted Species Permit in order to keep the birds.

The subsequent sickness of Dr. O'Leary's coyote hybrid, Cotie, set off a chain of events that resulted in the DFG removing Cotie and the wild birds for which she cared. As a result Cotie and over half of the wild birds died while in the custody of DFG. Though there was a stay of euthanasia in effect, it did not require the DFG to care for the animals in their custody.

On 9-22-2005, the court granted Dr. O'Leary Temporary Restraining Order. This order was issued to "maintain in a safe and secure environment the birds previously seized by DFG." With this order Dr. O'Leary regained temporary custody of the birds (9-22-2011 Hon. Charles R. Hayes' Court Ordered Temporary Restraining Order GIC 841347. This order transferred the birds seized by DFG back into Dr. O'Leary's care. It was done to "maintain in a safe and secure environment the birds previously seized by the DFG.") Though the Wildlife Center qualifies for a restricted species permit, Dr. O'Leary's permit application has been repeatedly denied by DFG. DFG wants to gain custody of the birds to have them destroyed. According to Dr. O'Leary, DFG's philosophy is if a wild animal is not able to make it in the wild it is better off dead. Senate Bill 856, will allow the birds to remain at the Wildlife Center and it will allow the Wildlife Center to continue its educational programs for school children.