

Stanislaus Wildlife Care Center's bundles of joy don't wear diapers

By Kimberly Horg
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HUGHSON — There's a baby shower Saturday in Hughson, but these bundles of joy don't wear diapers. Rather, they have fur and feathers, beaks and sharp teeth.

The Fifth Annual Baby Animal Shower will be held this Saturday at the Stanislaus Wildlife Care Center on Fox Grove Fishing Access Road in Hughson. Punch and cookies

will be served while experts give talks on the furry babies. Demonstrations on how to feed the animals will be conducted during the day from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Just like a baby shower for a human, gifts are exchanged at the wildlife center's annual event. The gifts, which serve as the entrance fee for the baby shower, can be a gift certificate from Home Depot, Lowe's, Orchard Supply, Costco, Wal-mart, Target, Crossroads Feed &

Ranch Supply or supplies such as liquid bleach, napkins, bottled drinking water, frozen veggie mix, 13 gallon trash bags, paper towels, laundry detergent, smooth peanut butter, liquid hand soap. .23 and .37 postage stamps, all size Ziploc Bags, heated pads, liquid dish soap or Pedialyte (singles and non-flavored).

Most of the babies are birds but there are a wide range of animals that are housed at the care center until they are able to be

released into the wild. It has been in operation for 20 years and gets more than 2,000 displaced or injured animals a year.

"A lot of birds that we get fall out of their nests," said Christine Nicasio, executive director of the care center. "Some birds nest in palm trees so when people trim their trees the birds get orphaned or hurt."

Nicasio started out as a volunteer five years ago and got hooked, she said. She has taken

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animals to her home who need critical care. "My husband never knows what I am going to bring home," she said. "Last year we had a lot of bats that were brought in and they had to be hand fed, so I brought them home to feed them. Bats are cute but they sure are smelly."

Nicasio currently has an orphaned baby bob cat at her home, but to prevent it from becoming tame, she limits her contact with it to four times a day, when it's feeding.

The center gets many different species including hawks, owls, ravens, magpies, scrub jays, finches, sparrows, ferrets, beavers, turtles, weasels, possums, snakes, bob cats, and coyotes.

"It is great to see a success story, seeing the animal grow up, get strong and then get released is a very comforting feeling," said volunteer Jonell Hassapakis. "My

favorite animals are the hawks and owls. In my front yard that is surrounded by orchards, I have a red shoulder hawk that lives in a tree. It was raised at the center and then released."

The animals are fed on a special diet. Approximately 40 volunteers help to get the animals back in the wild. There are several local veterinarians that donate their time and materials to care for the animals. People are trained at the center in different areas of care. The center is overseen by several government agencies, including the Department of Fish & Game. It is illegal to nurse a wild animal without having the proper permits, and it is illegal to have a wild animal moved to a different area because of personal choice, Nicasio said.

The Stanislaus Wildlife Care Center is a non-profit organization. Volunteers (18 years or older) and donations are always welcomed.

To volunteer or donate call 883-9414.