



File photo

Cindy Kamler started Wildcare Eastern Sierra to help animals who are injured or sick, especially those who are injured by human-impact-related accidents.

# PERPETUAL MOTION

## For the love of all that's wild

Cindy Kamler of Keough's

By Kristina Blüm Justice

For the owl that gets caught on a barbwire fence, the orphaned baby raccoons, or the eagle with a broken wing, Cindy Kamler and her rehab center, Wildcare Eastern Sierra, are the only hope of survival.

"I didn't really plan to start a rehab center," she said. "I came to simplify my life in this beautiful place, but there was no rehab being done around here, so I thought I'd do whatever I could to help along the way."

During her time of serving Eastern Sierra wildlife, Kamler estimates she and her crew of volunteers have rescued more than 7,000 animals.

Kamler's work in the Eastern Sierra started with a

bird that her neighbor's cat attacked and grew from that point on. Soon, the veterinarians started calling. Then she pursued getting the necessary permits, then more space, then additional help, then money – and Wildcare Eastern Sierra has been growing ever since.

Her facility, which is located at Keoughs, can facilitate everything from baby animals in need of incubation to full-grown eagles. Mammals, reptiles and birds of almost every species have passed through the center – even skunks and ducks from the Bishop City Park.

Kamler was deeply involved in the performing arts in the Bay Area prior to coming to the Eastern Sierra. There, she owned a improvisation theater company where

a teenager named Robin Williams discovered a love for stand-up comedy. Her company toured the Bay Area and West Coast, and taught at schools and universities.

Kamler's journey with animal rehabilitation began 35 years ago, after her mother passed away. Kamler had always been an animal lover, but had no experience with birds or wildlife at the time. That was about to change.

"I was grieving," Kamler said. "A friend heard on the radio about a place in San Rafael that was looking for volunteers to help take care of injured wildlife. I called them up, and became a regular volunteer for eight or nine years."

Kamler served as the volunteer coordinator there, as well as the operations direc-

tor.

The year that she turned 50, Kamler traveled around the world for seven months, bringing with her nothing but a backpack and a sleeping bag. On this trip, she was able to experience wildlife in Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Tibet, Bali, and other countries. While other tourists flocked to museums, Kamler traveled to see wildlife, especially the gorillas.

Kamler first came to Bishop in 1995. Over the years, in addition to rehabilitation work, she has helped to develop a program called Living with Wildlife, which aims to help prevent potential risks to animals by helping educate their human neighbors.

For instance, Kamler said most people do not realize

that skunks eat mice. In a situation where a skunk was living under a shed next to a chicken coop, Kamler explained that there were mice going after the chicken feed, and the skunk came around looking for mice to eat. The home owner was able to change their dog's outdoor space to the front yard so the skunk would be left alone.

In the old days, skunks and other nuisance wildlife were trapped and relocated to areas like the Owens River, where they would no longer bother humans. This has changed; Kamler explained the state no longer allows the catch-and-release style of wildlife management because the survival rate for relocated animals is low, and relocating spreads diseases among wildlife.

But nobody wants to have raccoons throwing parties under the front porch. That's where Kamler's Living with Wildlife program comes in. Kamler has tools like one-way doors at her disposal that help animals move on, without trapping.

Another part of her program is bringing wildlife into classrooms. Razzle the Raven and Spirit the red-tail hawk are permanent residents of Wildcare Eastern Sierra, along with Half-Z and Early Girl the squirrels. These creatures all had problems that made it impossible for them to be released back into the wild. Instead, they represent their wild brethren and help educate the public about ways to live alongside wildlife.

"We try to get people to appreciate that we share our world with these guys and they play a role," Kamler said. "We try to get kids to understand that animals can be helped. We try to encourage them to be proactive in situations where wildlife is involved."

Kamler has dealt with some pretty amazing situations over the years, but for her, the one that stands out the most was one particular male golden eagle.

He was found near the old county road in Big Pine, unable to fly. The eagle had a

fractured wing and was underweight. Wildcare Eastern Sierra took care of his initial care, but as in many cases involving eagles, the Wildcare crew contacted a specialist who had a facility more capable of handling the massive birds. The eagle experts didn't give this bird any chance at survival, and advised euthanasia. Instead, Kamler took the eagle to the facility she had volunteered at in the Bay Area, where there is a 100-foot flight capable of handling a bird the size of an eagle. As soon as the eagle was let loose, he flew 50 feet.

"We knew he would recover, so we saved him," Kamler said.

When the eagle was recovered, they brought him back to Big Pine. A small crowd gathered to watch as the eagle was released. When he was freed, he flew up to some rocks. The group of people who had assembled to watch were shocked when the eagle suddenly flew into the air – and he wasn't alone. His mate had joined him within two

minutes of release, and they immediately went into a courtship dance, soaring together through the Eastern Sierra sky.

"It's always exciting to see a release, but to see the courtship," Kamler paused, "It was the most thrilling release I've ever seen."

Looking to the future, Kamler simply said, "I'll just keep doing what I can."

At the end of the day, it's easy to ask, why bother? Why care for wildlife? Why interfere?

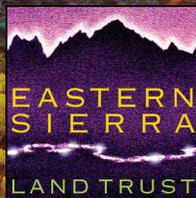
Kamler recalled a time when she was asked that very question by a friend. Kamler had been working a difficult shift at the center in San Rafael, and they had a fawn that was refusing to drink.

"I love this Earth," Kamler said. "We're all connected, as part of the whole. We as a species have damaged the Earth a lot, and this is my way to put energy into helping. Everything is created and given life; who are we to say that one life matters more than another?"

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