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Wildlife Group Seeks Home

Irvine animal control unit will expand into Pacific Wildlife's building, Braille Institute teens are raising relocation funds.

By Laylan Connelly

Irvine – Stephen Patterson clenches a bowl filled with 3-inch fish. He hesitates as a hungry pelican snaps at his latex-covered hands.

Through thick eyeglasses, the 17-year-old student from the Braille Institute aims the bird's feeding bowl. He tosses the fish but misses.

No worries – the pelican scoops them off the floor and swallows in hardy gulps.

Patterson's weekly routine will be broken after the Irvine-based Pacific Wildlife Project shuts down June 30.

To help, partially sighted teens from the Braille Institute will hold a pancake breakfast Saturday at their school in Anaheim to help raise funds so Pacific Wildlife can relocate.

They have sold about 300 tickets. Their goal is 1,500.

Irvine is set to go forward with longtime plans to expand its animal-control division into the building leased by Pacific Wildlife. Pacific Wildlife officials do not have an idea yet where to relocate. And with nearly all of their \$60,000 annual budget going to feed the birds, they don't have any money either.

"Without us, these animals will be euthanized or die," said Linda Winkle, volunteer coordinator at Pacific Wildlife.

Currently under its care are about 50 injured or abandoned birds and animals – many more counting the ducks. The week-old ducklings – each small enough to scoop up in the palm of a hand – live in a fish tank that serves as an incubator, snuggled under a red heat lamp.

A note on the fish tank reads: "Found in concrete parking structure. No ponds or creek around. No mom."

A raccoon with one good eye, once carrying maggots in wounds, is also cared for.

Pacific Wildlife came to Irvine seven years ago on an emergency basis in the wake of a botulism outbreak among pelicans at the Salton Sea.