

Baby bobcat healing with help from LTWC

By Cheryl Millham

On Aug. 25, I received a call from a volunteer about a baby bobcat which was found in the Chips Fire burn area near Lake Almanor.

Ania Wrona, a new LTWC volunteer who lives in the area, took the call and worked with California Fish and Game and the fire crew who found Chips. Ania finally got the OK to go to the fire camp and pick up the bobcat and begin the transportation to LTWC in South Lake Tahoe.

The story of Chips sounds very familiar. Remember four years ago when firefighter Adam Deem picked up a little bear cub – in the Redding area – with four burned paws, all with second and third degree burns from the Moon Fire?



Chips is recovering at Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care so she can be returned to the wild.
Photo/LTWC

In this case, a fire crew went back to a burn area and there they saw this baby bobcat going around in circles with its

eyes white from ashes from the fire and tears caked. Her little nose was also encrusted with ash.

The fire crew superintendent, Tad Hair, of the Mad River Hand Crew, said they noticed the bobcat was walking in circles.

He said they looked around and did not find any other footprints in the ashes, thinking that a mom would be nearby. The kitten kept following the firefighter and, when they stopped walking, she climbed up on his boot.

The fire crew then took the baby bobcat back to the fire camp. It was then that Fish and Game gave Ania permission to transport the kitten to LTWC.

Ania called and said she would be able to transport the bobcat as far as Sierraville (about 30 minutes north of Truckee). I looked in our transportation book to see who was willing and available to transport this bobcat down to LTWC. I saw a new LTWC volunteer, Sean Bailey, who lives in Truckee and called him to see if he was willing – and able – to help us out. In addition, Sean is a firefighter for Northstar Fire Department.

Sean said he would be happy to meet Ania in Sierraville. I then asked him what a firefighter would do for eyes, heat and ashes. He told me they would irrigate the eyes with sterile water. I asked him to take everything he would need and wash out the kittens eyes as soon as he saw her.

I asked Sean to call Tom when he left Sierraville so he could meet Tom at Spooner Summit for the last leg.

All went well and Tom and the baby kitten arrived at LTWC Saturday night at about 8:30pm. A call was then made to Dr. Kevin Willitts to examine Chips.

Dr. Willitts arrived about 10pm to give a thorough exam and determine what medical procedure we would begin.

The kitten was given subcutaneous fluids and Dr. Willitts

cleaned the blistered pads by trimming away all of the burned tissue on all four feet, which had second degree burns. He then medicated her eyes with instructions to continue the ointment three times a day for four days.

Chips had about five burn spots on her fur, but, only one burned through to her skin.

Chips received her name by Tad Hair, so we have kept that same name.

When LTWC received Chips she was about 7 weeks old and weighed just less than 1½ pounds. I would have liked to have given her a bath, but Dr Willitts said he didn't want her feet to get wet until they have healed.

So, Jolena Hearn, a senior volunteer with LTWC, who was at the center the next day, gave Chips a spit bath that really helped the burn smell on her fur.

Looking at Chips' teeth, I knew she was able to eat soft food. At this age, her mother would be regurgitating food for her. So, back to what I call Mush Mouse. Chips began eating it with relish.

She has been eating 12 mice a day (three mice per feeding, four times per day). The mice are (are you ready for this) skinned, pounded out and cut up into small bites, after they are chopped up with a cleaver.

Tom has fixed up one side of the aviary with dri-deck, covered with sheets so we can keep her paws dry and clean. This keeps her out of the dirt and on something soft, for her recovering pads. She will be spending a few hours a day outside.

And Chips is now on our webcam (when she is outside, usually in the afternoon).

We expect Chips to fully recover and be released back to the wild.

By the way, she has become quite a celebrity. We have been getting calls from newspapers, radio stations and television stations from as far away as New York City.

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