

part of a family that lived on the golf course, and it was unusually tame. “I’ve worked with injured great blue herons before, and they’re extremely hard to manage in captivity. Everything you do with them causes trauma,” notes Macquisten. “But this guy was quite calm. You could pick him up and examine him and he didn’t struggle very much. He had all the attributes of a good patient.”

Because of the bird’s unique temperament, and also because of the sandhill crane’s rarity in the region (there are only five known breeding pairs in the Lower Mainland), Macquisten opted to see what could be done to save it. When it became clear that the blood flow could not be restored, he amputated the lower part of the crane’s leg. He then rigged up a temporary splint so the bird could use it as support.

The vet next constructed a prosthesis out of a wooden dowel rod and salvaged wire with a basket. The prosthesis extended from above the amputation site down to a point below. “As soon as we put him back on his feet, he gave his feathers a shake and seemed to be back to his old self,” Macquisten says.

The crane is now recuperating and gaining strength on a diet of grain, blueberries and cat food at Elizabeth’s Wildlife Centre in Abbotsford. “He does not seem to be in any pain and he is in good health, but he has been getting quite bored with his situation,” Macquisten says. “To help keep him occupied, they have attached stuffed toys to the ceiling above his enclosure.”

In the meantime, golfers at the course where the bird was injured have been raising money to help with his recovery and holding a contest to come up with a name for the bird. “Stumpy” appears to be the front-runner.

Macquisten is now working with a U.S. company to develop a more permanent bionic leg that would allow the crane to be returned to the wild, a feat that has never been accomplished before. However, even if they are successful, Macquisten contends that it must be a compromised wild.

“We might have to keep him in a fenced area, and we might have to render him flightless. The goal is to give him an equal chance with birds that have not been injured. It was a lousy start for this guy, but hopefully it will have a happy ending.” 🐾

# Who Wants to Live Forever?

Hydra, apparently. These small aquatic invertebrates have figured out how to defy the inevitable

By Jay Ingram Illustration by Pete Ryan



**S** TOP HUMAN AGING! SECRET FOUND IN POND water. You might laugh—or cringe—if you saw a headline like that, but there’s actually a pretty good case to be made for the statement being true.

Go scoop up some pond water in a jar, especially some with duckweed floating in it, and let it sit for a while. Not long after things settle, you will see hydra: small aquatic invertebrates with little tube-shaped bodies. One end of the tubes will be stuck to plants or the side of your jar. The other end will have tentacles waving about in the water. Imagine a giant squid with its back end anchored to a surface, but only 10 millimetres long.

On their scale, hydras deserve our admiration. They are brutally efficient hunters, for instance, but they’re important for an entirely different reason. If you cut one in half, it becomes two. You can cut it again and again and again, 20 times, 40 times. Each tiny piece becomes a new hydra. Or you can transplant a piece of one onto another and watch it develop. Or you can choose to stand back and simply watch as a single hydra grows buds from its body that become “adult” hydras. Oh, and around this time of year, they have sex, too.

## POND OF YOUTH

*Hydra are forever building new tissue to support their lives. Their secret? It’s all about the stem cells*