



# Wild Times

Dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and release of Southern California's sick, injured and orphaned wildlife

## The Malibu Community

### Key in the Rescue of Marine Mammals

By Heather Henderson, Stranding Coordinator

During this past fall and winter, between rescues calls for marine mammals, California Wildlife Center also worked to improve enclosure space. Walls were built around one entire pen, to keep the pups warm during the cold spring evenings, when temperatures drop below freezing. All the planning was well worth it, as just days after the upgrades were completed, the phone rang with reports of a California Sea Lion in need of assistance. CWC opened the doors to marine mammal rehabilitation earlier than ever before—January 1st.



Photo by Mira Sorvino

(Above) Sea Lion 17-1 was hiding in a cave. CWC staff might never have found it had it not been for help from the community.

There are many challenges associated with performing rescues along the beautiful Malibu coastline. The first patient of the year was wedged far into a cave in the rocky cliffs. This location, compounded by the shorter winter

days, could have proved unsuccessful had it not been for the caring people in Malibu.



Sea Lion 17-1 is gaining weight in care and doing well.

Photo by Alyssa Schlange

Most rescues are prompted by reports from the public, after sighting an animal in need of supportive or veterinary care. The simple act of calling our hotline [310 458 9453 (WILD)] is an essential part of the rehabilitation! Residents and visitors to the Malibu area often go further. They send photos, provide GPS pins and even remain on site (at a safe distance of 50+ feet) until our rescue team arrives. They guide us to the animal and let other concerned individuals know that the Marine Mammal Rescue Team is on the way. These extra steps can be essential to the rescue process, as distressed California Sea Lions will strive to find shelter and can easily blend in with the rocky coastline. Even when possible to locate without additional information, the photos and enhanced stranding details allow our team to better assess and prepare while en route to the site. Once there, a more efficient rescue can mean removal from a potentially stressful environment and the ability to provide care sooner.

California Wildlife Center's marine mammal program owes much of its success to the commitment of the people of Malibu for helping us to preserve this one part of what makes Malibu so special.



Photo courtesy of Kathleen Fanning Lojkovic

Sea Lion 17-12 was hiding behind some fencing.

**Inside:** Save the Date: Feathers, Flippers, and Fur Family Picnic, The Awesome Opossum, CWC makes improvements & more ...

## Living With Animals: Over Rescue

By Ken White, Board President, California Wildlife Center

We are nearing the first day of Spring when, to mangle Tennyson's lovely words, a young humaniac's fancy turns lightly to thoughts of rescuing baby birds. Say what..?

Spring, the season of rebirth, and we're already receiving calls from kind-intentioned people who've found baby birds, and baby squirrels, out of the nest but apparently unable to care for themselves. Yes, it makes sense to worry but, no, scooping babies up and rushing to our wildlife rehab center is not necessarily the best thing. In fact, potentially it's "over rescuing."

Hard as it is, sometimes (even often) the best thing for these babies is to be left alone.

Babies which are almost ready to fly (or squirrels to scurry) often flap and fall. That may place them at risk, but it is not necessarily The End. Often mothers will continue to protect and feed babies on the ground below nests, warding off potential predators (assuming they're a type mom can handle) and encourage them to take those first flaps (or, for squirrels, first hops).

The cliché that mom will reject babies handled by smelly humans is untrue. If the nest is located where it's safe to return the babies, do so. Mom will not object.

Common sense has to prevail, requiring your eyes and brain for each specific situation. If the area is heavily trafficked by noisy children, dogs or free roaming cats, then the odds shift radically. But if this is a quiet corner of the yard, and your cats are indoor-only animals (as they should be, please!), then hands-off is probably the best option. Uncertain? You can always call us (310-458-9453, select option 2) to help you make that assessment.



Fledgling California Towhee

Photo by Kim Barker

We are here to help. Injured and orphaned native wild animals can be brought to California Wildlife Center. Last year we helped 4,072 native wildlife. But we're here to help mom, not replace her.

## GO GREEN!

Help save trees by signing up to receive Wild Times via email. Visit [www.cawildlife.org](http://www.cawildlife.org) and click on "Sign Up for Our Newsletter" at the bottom of the page to update your email address

## Opossums: More Friend Than Foe

By Anna Noble, Administrative Assistant

California Wildlife Center admits an average of 250 opossums yearly. Of this number, 40-50 are adults, while the remainder are orphans. Most adult opossums who are admitted have experienced bodily injury due to trapping, predation, gun shots, or encounters with vehicles on roadways. Joeys (the word for baby opossums) that are seven inches or longer should be left if found alone unless they show obvious sign of injury. Smaller joeys should come to CWC for treatment.

While the opossum is sometimes perceived as a "nuisance" animal, they serve a pivotal role in the ecosystem. Opossums act as nature's double-duty pest control and sanitation. They eat mice, rats, snakes, worms, slugs and insects, rotting fruits and vegetables, and even garbage. As they have an unusually high need for calcium, they often eat the skeletons of rodents and road kill for a boost.

Opossums are incorrectly perceived as unclean and disease-ridden animals. In fact, they bathe and groom themselves nearly as often as house cats. They also have very powerful immune systems which fend off many diseases. Opossums almost never have rabies, as their low body makes it difficult for the virus to survive. They are even immune to the venoms of snakes, scorpions and bees, as well as to ricin and botulinum toxin! Despite having some similar physical traits, opossums are not related to rodents and are actually the only marsupial found in North America.



Young Virginia Opossum

Photo by Kim Barker

Despite their tendency to appear vicious when showing their fifty teeth, opossums are rarely looking for trouble. They are very docile animals, and when threatened their first instinct is to simply run away. If danger persists, they will show their teeth and make a hissing sound. And when neither of these options prevail, they fall into a comatose state in which their bodies temporarily freeze, causing them to appear lifeless. This defense mechanism is known as "playing possum."

## California Wildlife Center Makes Some Shocking Improvements

By Heather Patrice Brown, Development Coordinator

In December of 2016, California Wildlife Center finally bid farewell to its 64 year-old electrical panel. This change had been a long-time coming.

The main building was originally constructed in 1952 as a private home and later became a ranger station. In 1998, California State Parks granted CWC the right to use the building and land surrounding it. CWC grew as more animals needed care, adding three temporary buildings and turning the car port into what is now the Intensive Care Unit. Along with the addition of buildings were more incubators, refrigerators, an X-ray machine, and countless other appliances and machines required for providing state-of-the-art veterinary care to our patients. The electrical system, designed to power a single-family home, was simply not up to the task.

After receiving permission from the California Department of Parks and Recreation to make the required upgrades, and funding for the project, including a generous grant from the S. Mark Taper Foundation, work began on December 12th.

The timing of the project was key. We knew the electrical system would have to be down for a period of time, so December was chosen because it is traditionally the month with the least patients. Generators were used to keep key components running while the rest of CWC was in the dark.



Our hospital building was a carport used for storage before being converted into the ICU, one of many changes to CWC since 1998. Photo circa 2004..

The work was completed quickly and efficiently and soon CWC had new main and sub-electrical panels, repaired outlets, new outlets, and a new underground irrigation box. The electrical system is up to code for a wildlife hospital and CWC will be able to continue to provide optimum care for our patients for years to come.

## Eat Burritos to Help Wildlife

Join California Wildlife Center at Chipotle at 3822 Cross Creek Rd in Malibu on Thursday, March 23rd from 4pm to 8pm. Chipotle will donate 50% of the proceeds to CWC! Visit <http://cawildlife.org/chipotle-fundraising-night/> to print out the flyer and then bring it with you. Tell your friends! Pick up dinner for the family! Chipotle offers vegan and gluten-free options.

## Save The Date

Feathers, Flippers, and Fur Family Picnic!

Saturday, June 24th  
at  
Malibu Bluffs Park  
11:30am to 3:30pm.

Enjoy delicious food, entertainment,  
games, prizes, and more!

Sponsorship opportunities available

Visit [www.cawildlife.org](http://www.cawildlife.org) for more details



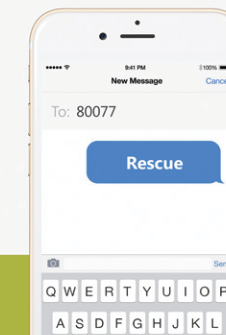
Photo by Harry Varnos

A big thank you to the Pet Food Bank (<http://thepetfoodbank.com/>) for donating food and supplies for California Wildlife Center's animal patients.

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## Room for Swallows to Soar

By Denys Hemen, Hospital Manager

Here at California Wildlife Center space has always been at a premium. As the only rehab center in Los Angeles County that rehabilitates baby songbirds, space disappears quickly in the springtime. But, anytime you get a large number of baby birds crammed into a small area many problems can arise. It becomes very hard to keep them clean. Internal parasites can run rampant. In general, just being inside can cause some developmental issues. Birds just want to be outside where they belong! Our swallows were getting anxious to stretch their wings but would continue to eat from our hands inside. They are notorious for their extended weaning period. These trouble makers would constantly escape from their enclosure and fly around the room but were still too young for our large aviary. That's why we have constructed our fledgling cliff swallow aviary!

This small ( 6ft x6ftx 8ft tall ) but secure aviary allows our younger swallows, who aren't quite ready for the big aviary yet, to stretch their wings. They have more room to move around and develop at a much quicker pace. Inside their aviary, we have free choice food but some of these young ones haven't quite grasped the whole self-feeding thing yet. That is where we come in! Every 45 mins we enter the aviary and hold up a juicy worm with tweezers. The swallows swarm around, dive down, and grab the worm from our grasp! This gives them some much needed practice because once in the wild these birds will catch flying insects "on the wing". We also collect fruit scraps in buckets that are left inside the aviary to attract fruit flies. The swallows practice their hunting skills on these tiny flying insects.



A Cliff Swallow eats a mealworm "on the wing."

Photo by Jenn Guess

Once the whole group is eating on their own and refuse hand-feeding, we move them to an aviary that is nearly 10 times larger where they develop their flight muscles and prepare to move on to the next step, a release into the wild!