



WildTimes

Spring 2019

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

California Wildlife Center Responds to Whale Stranding

By Stephany Lewis, DVM, Veterinarian

In January, CWC's Marine Mammal Rescue Team, led by Mike Remski, responded to a call about a small stranded whale on Zuma Beach in Malibu. The small whale was an adult female Pygmy Sperm Whale, CWC's first live Whale stranding response. With the help of a team of volunteers and lifeguards, the animal was moved from the beach to the CWC rescue van for further assessment.

On physical examination, the whale was in good body condition, but had several superficial wounds and abrasions, possibly from being thrown in the rough surf, and an abscess just in front of her fluke, or tail. She also had severe conjunctivitis of both eyes with some corneal lesions. This inflammation of the eyes could have been from either trauma or infection. It was unclear at the time why exactly the whale had stranded. However, these animals do not strand for no reason; single-cetacean strandings usually occur due to injury or severe illness.

After consultation with marine mammal experts at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as well as veterinarians from Sea World San Diego, the closest facility capable of rehabilitating a marine mammal of this size and only one within transport range, the difficult decision was made to humanely euthanize the whale. Pygmy Sperm Whales are rarely rehabilitated successfully, at least partially because these deep-diving cetaceans do not fare well when being housed in shallow pools for extended periods of time. Additionally, for an adult whale to strand severe illness is assumed, making the prognosis for a full recovery very poor.

The whale was humanely euthanized at Zuma beach with a combination of intravenous anesthetic drugs, administered in a vein just in front of the fluke. Her remains were sent to the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles for necropsy, and to be used for future museum exhibits.



The Pygmy Sperm Whale was moved to the CWC rescue van for evaluation
Photo by Jennifer Guess



The Whale stranded on Zuma Beach
Photo by Gaston Otero

Inside: Treating a Parliament of Owls, Marine Mammal Department Braces for an Unpredictable Season, Mockingbirds: Masters of Mimicry & more!

Treating a Parliament of Owls

By Cambria Wells, Wildlife Technician



This Long-Eared Owl suffered a wing fracture
Photo by Samantha Orzec



Barn Owl 19-62 arrived with a broken leg
Photo by Cambria Wells

It's the beginning of Owl breeding season, and the intensive care unit is packed with an assortment of these special birds. Owls are among CWC's most diverse patients; they encompass some of our largest and smallest raptor patients, come from a dramatic range of habitats and circumstances, and have some of the new year's most impressive recovery stories.

A Long-Eared Owl rescued in Malibu this past December has just moved to an outdoor enclosure for conditioning. He was injured while overwintering in our area. The soft tissue damage around his wing fracture meant that his prognosis was guarded, but two months and several surgeries later he is flying with confidence and nearly ready to return to the wild. This Long-Eared Owl and a Western Screech-Owl, both current CWC patients, had part of an eye removed this month. Thanks to their highly sensitive hearing, these birds are adjusting well and will still be able to thrive and hunt in the wild upon release.

Another CWC Owl patient, a Barn Owl, was admitted after the recent storms with two fractures to the tarsometatarsus bone in her lower leg. She was very wet and dirty from being found on the side of the road, leaving her weak and unable to thermoregulate. Her unstable condition and the proximity of the fracture to a joint made her surgery difficult, but thanks to Dr. Stephany Lewis' work in pinning her bone she now has a brighter future ahead.

Our Owl patients display their will and vivacity by surviving head trauma, serious fractures, secondary poisoning and more. Currently, we are experiencing an influx of injured Owls as they compete for breeding partners. We will see another wave when orphaned Owlets begin to arrive in early March, and when juvenile Owls run into trouble after leaving their parents later this summer. Every one of these patients, and their healthy cousins beyond our walls, deserve all the care, conservation, and respect that we can offer as they live out their wild lives around us.

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Marine Mammal Department Braces for an Unpredictable Season

By Michael Remski, Marine Mammal Program Manager

The 2019 Sea Lion pup season is off and running here at CA Wildlife Center.

Armed with a seasonal employee, a host of fresh volunteers, and a newly constructed fish preparation kitchen, we are prepared for a very successful season.

A warm welcome goes out to Mackenzie Glass, our seasonal employee, who comes to us with lots of pinniped (seal and sea lion) expertise and experience from Marine Mammal Care Center Los Angeles. A special thanks also goes out to all the volunteers, new and returning, who have chosen to spend their time helping to make our marine mammal program a success.

This year to date, we have had ten sea lion patients in house, as compared to 2018 which only brought us three sea lions in January, and another two by the end of February. The higher numbers are typical, and actually represents a more "normal" year than 2018.

Although the numbers are typical, the strandings have been anything but. Of particular interest are the two live cetacean (whale and dolphin) strandings that 2019 has brought us. The Pygmy Sperm Whale and Right Whale Dolphin strandings were two species which have never stranded alive in Malibu before this year. Is this a sign of things to come? Or just a bizarre opening to our 2019 season? While we are hoping for the latter, we are preparing for the unusual, which is actually becoming more and more usual. Specialized equipment and protocols, that have always been in place but rarely used, have now become key to properly dealing with these strandings, and best caring for these animals. Plans are currently in the works for purchasing upgraded cetacean transport equipment.

Back at the center, our new marine mammal kitchen is up and running. Fish preparation is quick and efficient, leaving our energy and focus for what we do best, caring for our patients. So far, every single sea lion patient has responded well to treatment and is on their way to a full recovery.



Two of the nine Sea Lion patients
Photo by Heather Henderson



CWC's Marine Mammal Team and LA County Lifeguards rescue a Northern Right Whale Dolphin
Photo by April Martinez

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Photo by Anne Slattery

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Mockingbirds: Masters of Mimicry, with Just a Note of Mystery!

by Melissa Hartman, Administrative Assistant



CWC sees many fledgling mockingbirds each year
Photo by Jamie Pelayo

Mockingbirds sing one heckuva lot. You can hear them all year long, at any time of the day, compiling sequences of repeated phrases, including riffs on calls made by other bird species. Like other songbirds, Mockingbirds' songs are used mainly for courting or to defend territory.

Weighing in at a measly two ounces, a male Northern Mockingbird can produce several hundred phrases, picking up notes acoustically comparable to their own cadence and tone, including calls of other birds such as Jays, Hawks, Orioles, Robins and many others, as well as non-avian impersonations of dogs, cats, frogs—and even car alarms, cell phones and police sirens! They're not called by their scientific name, *Mimus polyglottos*—"mimic of many tongues"—for nuthin'.

The Northern Mockingbird is one of 14+ Mockingbird species, many of which "mock," but why? Some bird species imitate others to frighten their neighbors and steal their food; however, scientists have noted no change in behavior in birds imitated by Mockingbirds. Birds also are known to copy songs as a courtship strategy, but leading bird behaviorists cannot conclusively point to this as a hypothesis for why exactly Mockingbirds mock.

Last year at California Wildlife Center, Northern Mockingbirds were ninth of the ten most frequent species of the 4,300 animal patients seen. We took in 122 for a number of reasons: caught by cats, attacked by raccoons, with broken limbs, injured in window-strikes, orphaned.

As a CWC patient, the Northern Mockingbird is talkative and curious. It's a pleasure to care for and release them to continue their amazing vocalizing in the wild!



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