



WildTimes

Fall 2019

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

Woodpecker Nestlings Rescued from Branch Collapse

By Cambria Wells, Wildlife Technician

In early July, a Mimosa tree in Newbury Park cracked open, half the tree splitting apart at weak points created by years of Woodpecker activity. The homeowners had been expecting just such a thing to happen eventually; it had been assessed for removal in previous years but their affection for their local Woodpecker colony, which nested in the tree year after year, had driven them to keep the tree as long as they could. One such nest came apart when the tree broke, dropping four naked, blind little nestling Acorn Woodpeckers into the sage planted below. Thanks to this soft landing and shade, the four babies were alive when the homeowners responded, collecting them and bringing them to California Wildlife Center for evaluation.



Acorn Woodpecker nestlings
Photo by Cambria Wells

Though the Woodpeckers were uninjured, their home tree was still unstable and needed to be trimmed to prevent the destruction of a second nest in the tree. After fluid therapy and the initiation of feedings every thirty minutes, the four nestlings settled in for a hopefully temporary stay in an incubator at CWC. They proved to be excellent eaters with a very strict "pecking order" and regained their strength quickly. Four days later, with the Mimosa tree carefully trimmed to save the Woodpecker colony's other nest, staff from California Wildlife Center responded to attempt to reunite the Woodpecker nestlings with their parents. The homeowners had observed four Woodpeckers providing food to another nest in the tree. In the absence of their own babies, it's likely that the parents of the rescued Woodpeckers had turned to assisting their family members in the care of another nest.

Tree trimmers had saved the portion of the branch which contained the original nest, so CWC staff used heavy-duty straps to close the log and mount it on the Mimosa tree, as close to the original branch location as possible. The four rescued Woodpeckers were given copious amounts of food and water by mouth, then placed back in the nest cavity via the entry hole created by their parents. Unfortunately, despite the begging of the nestlings, they were not recognized by their family, and their parents did not approach to feed or care for them. Acorn Woodpeckers are highly territorial and family-oriented; the three days it took for the area to become safe to return the babies and the change in location of the nest were likely the reason the nestlings were not accepted back.

Luckily for the nestlings, they had a warm welcome back waiting at California Wildlife Center. Staff extracted the four babies from the log, and brought them back into care. Several weeks later they are all thriving fledglings, now fully feathered and able to fly, hop, and use their amazing bills and tongues like adults. They have been united with a foster family of five other individually orphaned Woodpeckers. Once all are self-feeding, this summer's nine Acorn Woodpecker siblings will be moved to an outdoor enclosure to condition for soft-release in the oak forests of the Santa Monica mountains. There they will be fed and protected until they can integrate with a colony and be safely released.



Woodpeckers as fledglings
Photo by Cambria Wells



The broken tree limb
Photo by Cambria Wells

Inside: CWC Sees Spate of Sea Lions with Shark Bites, Caring for Bandit-Faced Babies, Newcastle Disease at CWC, Skunks, Smelly or Sweet?

CWC Sees Spate of Sea Lions with Shark Bites

By Mike Remski, Marine Mammal Program Manager

The mere mention of Sharks in our coastal waters usually conjures up nightmarish images of horror movies of the past. However, Sharks have always been in our local waters and normally don't cause any harm -- to humans that is. But lately Shark predatory behavior has been a topic of concern when it comes to Sea Lions, specifically for the rescue team at CWC.

Normal diets of large Sharks, like the Great White and the Mako, include mammals and fish, and Seals and Sea Lions are at the top of the menu. And although this is the normal circle of life, it can be a difficult situation not only for the animals who survive an attack but for the rehabbers as well.

This past July, CWC has responded to five Sea Lions with injuries caused by sharks. This is on par with what we would normally see in an entire year.

It's important to understand that the increase in shark-bitten stranded Sea Lions does not necessarily reflect an increase in the number of Sharks present. After all, we are only able to count the number of Sea Lions that survive the attack and make it to shore, while the ones that die at sea and/or become food, will not be accounted for. Also, there is no way to tell where the attack occurred, since a wounded Sea Lion can swim many miles before beaching.



Sea Lion in Foreground with a Shark Bite
Photo by Mackenzie Glass

So why the increase in stranded Sea Lions with Shark bites this year? There are a few theories, and although no one really knows for sure, it would make sense that the non-lethal bites are being delivered by young or inexperienced Sharks. But whatever the reason, a live stranded Sea Lion suffering from Shark bites will most likely not do well without help, and that's where CWC steps in.

Such was the case with CWC patient 19-151. The pup stranded on June 9th with multiple wounds to her neck and hip area. She was one of the lucky ones, as the injuries did not puncture any major arteries or destroy too much tissue. With the help of medications and wound treatments, the CWC staff and volunteers were able to nurse her back to health. After seven weeks of rehabilitation, she was ready to return to her ocean home and was released at Nicholas Canyon on July 31st.

Since July, these shark bite occurrences have tapered off, which is good news for the rescue team and it also seems to calm the nerves of the general public. But as long as you're not a Sea Lion, you really have very little to worry about.

Caring for Bandit-Faced Babies

By Jennifer Brent, Executive Director

Which animal has five fingers but no thumb? This animal is sometimes known as a "trash panda" and has a mixed reputation in urban areas. It's a Raccoon, of course!

While we don't care for Raccoons on-site at CWC, we do have a few amazing and dedicated home care volunteers who will raise orphaned kits from young babies to juveniles ready for release. Due to the types of diseases that the Raccoons can carry and CWC's limitations, all of them are cared for off-site.

Generally, members of the public will find baby Raccoons and contact us. The rescuer may have scared the mother away and then found the babies, or they have found a single kit by themselves. Raccoons give birth in the Spring with two to five kits in a litter. Our home care volunteers feed them milk replacement and gradually add solid food, and the babies are generally weaned at 16 weeks. Once they are old enough to find food on their own, they are released back into the wild. Adult Raccoons are omnivores and eat invertebrates, vegetables, and vertebrates such as rats, frogs, and fish.

"The Raccoon babies are playful and love to explore," says Glenn Ellis, longtime homecare volunteer, adding "they are masters at figuring things out." Raccoons are known for being smart and have been compared to primates in their potential for intelligence. Many people think that Raccoons must wash their food prior to consumption. However, studies have shown that the cleanliness of food bears no influence. Instead, Raccoons put their food underwater to better feel it—the water moistens their paws so that their tactile perception is increased. *(continued on page 3)*

(continued from page 2)

Raccoons can be considered a nuisance animal in Los Angeles' urban environment. Every year we receive calls about Raccoons who have given birth inside peoples' garages or attics. The best way to deter a Raccoon is exclusion—sealing your home properly so that any unwanted guest (rodents, Raccoons, skunks, etc.) cannot enter. The second best way is to be careful about trash disposal. An unlatched trash can is an invitation to any animal for a free meal. Additionally, feeding outdoor cats is like setting out a buffet for any outdoor animals from rodents to reptiles to Raccoons. While we vaccinate all of our Raccoons against distemper and parvo virus, Raccoons in the wild can harbor diseases that are dangerous for humans and pets.



Newborn Raccoon Kit
Photo by Jennifer Brent



Juvenile Raccoons
Photo by Jennifer Brent

Hunting for Raccoon fur and meat has existed in North America for hundreds of years reaching its peak in the 1970s with 5.2 million Raccoons killed in a single year, mainly for their fur. It wasn't until the 1990s that Raccoon fur went out of fashion and hunting diminished.

Each year our home care volunteers Glenn Ellis, Sharon Leckbee, and Michele Morse care for 25-30 Raccoon kits. We do not accept adult Raccoons at CWC due to our limitations for enclosures. If you have a nuisance adult Raccoon, please contact your area's animal care and control agency.

Newcastle Disease Impacts CWC

By Dr. Stephany Lewis, Veterinarian

Since May of 2018, Southern California, as well as parts of Arizona and Utah, have been impacted by a disease called Virulent Newcastle Disease (VND). Formerly known as Exotic Newcastle Disease, VND is an extremely contagious and deadly viral disease of birds. This virus can potentially infect humans but causes only mild conjunctivitis (inflammation around the eyes) and flu-like symptoms that resolve on their own without treatment. This disease primarily impacts poultry species, but no humans have been infected by eating poultry products.

The nervous and respiratory systems are most commonly affected in birds infected with VND. Clinical signs in infected poultry can include sneezing, coughing, nasal discharge, swelling around the eyes, depression, twisting of the neck, difficulty walking, and diarrhea. However, some birds may exhibit sudden death without any preceding clinical signs. Conversely, it is also possible for birds to be infected and shedding the disease without any signs of illness, particularly in psittacine birds (parrots). Some parrots can shed the virus for over a year. The virus is shed in respiratory secretions and feces of infected birds, and can be transmitted via contaminated people, feed, or equipment, as well as directly bird-to-bird.



California Quail
Photo by Cambria Wells



Mourning Doves
Photo by Cambria Wells

Sadly, there is no cure for VND, and prevention is only possible with stringent biosecurity measures. The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) have put in place strict quarantine and other biosecurity regulations, which can be found on their website at cdfa.ca.gov. These regulations have been significantly impacting both the commercial poultry industry, as well as backyard poultry owners within the quarantine zones of LA, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties. These regulations have also impacted us here at California Wildlife Center. Some of the regulations put forth by both the CDFA as well as California Department of Fish and Wildlife include prevention of the movement of wild poultry species if they have been housed at the same facility as domestic poultry species. Wild poultry species that we treat at CWC include Mourning Doves, Ducks, Geese, Band-Tailed pigeons, and Quail. Every year we have many patients transferred to us by LA county animal shelters; however, because these facilities house domestic poultry, they have not been allowed to transfer us any wild poultry species. Staff and volunteers who own birds at home also have had to practice some biosecurity measures, such as changing shoes and clothes.

Over 400 cases of VND have been confirmed, and over 1.5 million poultry have died or been euthanized due to the outbreak, but no new cases have been confirmed since August 30, 2019. For now, it is still important for everyone working with birds to continue practicing enhanced biosecurity, as the virus will remain in the environment for several more months, but hopefully, no new cases will be detected, and the disease is soon eradicated.

Publisher California Wildlife Center

Design SV3 Designs

Contributors

Jennifer Brent
Cori Carlson
Mackenzie Glass
Rebecca Hernandez
Mike Remski
Cambria Wells
Dr. Stephany Lewis

Board of Directors

President: Ken White
Secretary: Debbie Fischer
Treasurer: Aaron Frank
Operations Chair: Katie Dinneen
Board Member: Lisa Newell, DVM

Staff

Executive Director: Jennifer Brent
Veterinarian: Stephany Lewis, DVM
Marine Program Manager: Michael Remski
Stranding Coordinator: Heather Henderson
Senior Wildlife Technician: Jenn Guess
Wildlife Technician: Cambria Wells
Wildlife Technician: Sam Orzech
Wildlife Technician: Luis Vasquez
Volunteer and Outreach Manager: Kristilee Kodis
Development Manager: Heather Patrice Brown
Administrative Assistant: Cori Carlson

CWC is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. We do not receive any sustaining local, state or federal funding. Please donate today! Tax ID #95-4580790



Printed on recycled paper.
Please read, share and
recycle.

Contents © 2019
California Wildlife Center
P.O. Box 2022
Malibu, CA 90265
Emergency Hotline: 310-458-WILD
Fax: 818-222-2685
Email: admin@cawildlife.org
www.cawildlife.org



P.O. Box 2022 Malibu, CA 90265

Skunks, Smelly or Sweet?

By Cori Carlson, Administrative Assistant

California Wildlife Center has admitted 25 Striped Skunks so far this year. That's up from last year's total of 19 patients. Best known for their smelly self-defense tactic and distinctive white stripes and black coat, this particular native species of Skunk ranges throughout North America from Southern Canada to Northern Mexico and are easy to identify with two thick white stripes along their back and tail. Variations in color are possible, though. This year, we admitted one with white armpits.



Striped Skunks
Photo by Rebecca Hernandez

Their pungent-smelling spray comes from two glands located near the base of their tail. Young Skunk kits are capable of spraying when they are as young as eight days old. This line of defense can give the small mammals a bad reputation, but they will warn animals or people before spraying. They arch their backs, raise their tail, hiss, stomp their feet and sometimes do a handstand prior to spraying.

When a Skunk is admitted to CWC, they are initially quarantined for a week as they can carry rabies or distemper, a viral disease that affects the respiratory, gastrointestinal, and central nervous systems. Due to this risk, it's important not to touch or pick up a Skunk with your bare hands. Once they are determined to be healthy, we give them a distemper vaccine and put them into an enclosure with up to four other Skunks.

Skunks are omnivores, meaning they eat both plants and animals. When a kit is admitted into our care, they are initially fed a special milk-replacement formula. When they move onto solid foods, they eat a special mix of dry dog food, vegetables and a variety of either mice, mealworms, super worms or crickets. This is very similar to their diet in the wild, which consists of insects, small mammals, fruit and plants.

While in our care, we also give them enrichment boxes that help them use their excellent sense of smell and hone their hunting skills. The boxes have worms, fish, vegetables, or fruit hidden under leaves for them to find. We also put exercise wheels in the Skunk enclosures. They look similar to those you might see a Hamster run on but much bigger. They seem to love the wheels, and occasionally one will push another out to get a turn.

When the Skunks are ready to go back into the wild, we generally limit the number released at any one site to two or three. We do this because we want to make sure there are enough resources to give them the best chance to thrive back out in the wild.