



WildTimes

Spring 2021

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

Former CWC Sea Lion Patient Thriving in the Wild

By Heather Henderson, Marine Program Manager

At CWC and other marine rehab centers every pinniped (seal or sea lion) patient is outfitted with an orange flipper tag that has a unique identification number prior to their release. Spotting these tags on healthy animals in the wild provides rehabilitation centers valuable information about former patient survival and movement patterns.

On February 10th 2021, our marine mammal team spotted a sub-adult female California Sea Lion hauled out with others on a rock. We noticed a flipper tag on the right front flipper, indicating she had been at a marine mammal rehabilitation facility. Examining a picture snapped through binoculars we were able to read the identifiers -- W1134. Exciting news: this sea lion was originally rescued and cared for at CWC!

History of this animal: Rescued as a pup from Leo Carrillo Beach on May 14th 2017 which means she was born around June 15th 2016. Weighing only 40 pounds, she was about 55% of a healthy weight for her age and had an injured left eye. The eye was examined by the staff and topical eye medication administered. Additionally, a veterinary ophthalmic specialist came in to determine if special treatment should be considered. The conclusion that the eye damage was unchanging meant that no treatment course could restore vision; however, there also was no evidence of continued infection. She was released July 5th 2017 at Nicholas Canyon Beach, at a healthy weight of 75 pounds.



Point Dume in 2021
Photo by KC Scofield



W1134 at release in 2017
Photo by Heather Henderson

Six months later the patient was rescued again from Pirates Cove on Feb 6th 2018, back down to 40 pounds. When patients return it is referred to as a "re-strand." We gather information, treat any new ailments, and prepare them to be re-released. While we hope they will not re-strand, some individuals require more help preparing for life in the wild. After receiving a clean bill of health and weighing a robust 90 pounds, this female California Sea Lion was given another chance to succeed and released at Nicholas Canyon Beach on March 26th 2018.

Three years later, we are overjoyed to spot her in good body condition, sporting a healthy fur coat, and integrated into the local colony. After a rough start, rehabilitative care provided a path for this sea lion to not only survive but to thrive!

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Join us:

- **April 11th** at 8 am to **April 17th** at 5 pm - Auction open for bidding
- **April 17th** from 3 to 4 pm - celebration event at cawildlife.givesmart.com

Event will feature patients from CWC, music from local musicians, celebrity drop-ins, and a few surprises!

Sign up to participate at no cost and share with your animal-loving friends!

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310-458-9453 • cawildlife.org • admin@cawildlife.org

Cottontail Caught in Fence

By Dr. Guthrum Purdin, Veterinarian



Desert Cottontail Release
Photo by Brittany Moser

Late in January, a Desert Cottontail Rabbit was found with his head stuck under a fence and brought to a local vet clinic. The doctors there gave him some IV fluids and he was quickly transferred to our wildlife hospital's ICU. When the Cottontail first arrived at CWC, he was highly stressed and disoriented with a swollen face. There was also a small wound behind the left ear. Initially looking very ill, the Rabbit was given oxygen and moved to a warm incubator until stable enough for a thorough exam.

Rabbits have very sensitive, fragile skin and getting trapped like this can be very damaging. The pressure directly injures skin and muscle cells, but even worse, it restricts blood flow which can lead to a spreading necrosis or death of the surrounding tissue. It may take several days for the full extent of the injury to develop. Antibiotics, pain control, and anti-inflammatory medication were started, the wound was cleaned and dressed. By this time, he was standing and looking much brighter. The Cottontail was set up in a comfortable warm enclosure for the night and we settled in to wait and see how the injury would progress.

By the next morning, his appetite was great. He was up and alert, and actively trying to run away from his caregivers—just like a Rabbit is supposed to. As the days passed, and as feared, the injury behind the ear got larger and two big new wounds developed on the middle of the head and the back of the neck. The original wound was especially deep, and there was concern the Rabbit might lose his ear. During surgery, the dead tissue was all removed and afterwards, pain control meds increased.

Fortunately, rabbit skin, while fragile, heals incredibly fast. The wounds were cleaned and disinfected at first daily, then every other day, then once every three days. The Cottontail was scarfing up his food, scampering away when people checked on him, and generally looking like everything was normal, despite the severity of his injuries. It took less than four weeks for this rabbit to go from looking like he was at death's door to being fully recovered and able to be released. Amazing! If you find yourself in Woodland Hills and see a Desert Cottontail Rabbit out nibbling grass in a field, it might be this very one. Good luck, little bunny...and stay clear of fences!

Warm Weather Friends

By Cori Carlson, Administrative Assistant

In Spring, we all expect to see lots of baby squirrels and baby birds. But here in Southern California, as the weather warms up, we also start seeing more activity from our local lizards. One of the most common species found in the Santa Monica Mountains is the Western Fence Lizard, appropriately named because they are often spotted running along fences. California Wildlife Center (CWC) admitted seven of these small reptiles last year. The majority of these patients were injured by a house cat or wild predators. In the past, we have also admitted lizards who were unintended victims of glue traps. While these lizards are being rehabilitated at CWC, our technicians provide a diet of mealworms, flies, fruit flies and crickets similar to what they eat in the wild.

Growing up to 8.4 inches in length, Western Fence Lizards are covered with gray, tan and brown scales. This camouflage, though, hides a secret which earned them the nickname "blue-bellies." Adult males have bright blue patches on their stomach and neck which makes them stand out to females and helps attract mates. You will often see male Western Fence Lizards doing push-ups to show off their handsome colors and warn away other males during mating season.

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Contributors

Heather Patrice Brown
Cori Carlson
Heather Henderson
Brittany Moser
Dr. Guthrum Purdin, DVM
KC Scofield

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Heather Patrice Brown
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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



Two Western Fence Lizards
Photo by Heather Patrice Brown

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Cold blooded, these lizards regulate their body temperature by moving in and out of the sun. This is why we see them out during the day often sunbathing themselves on paths, rocks, and fences. Unfortunately sunbathing also can make them an easy target. An encounter with a domestic pet or natural predator can result in lacerations or puncture wounds. To help protect themselves from these injuries, the small lizards have fast reflexes (maybe because all of those push-ups 😊) and are able to drop their tail to escape predators and regrow it within 3-5 weeks.

Western Fence Lizards are more than just good food for our local predators; they are directly beneficial to humans by lowering the occurrence of Lyme Disease. When infected ticks feed on these reptiles, a protein in their blood kills the bacteria that causes Lyme disease, cleansing the tick of the disease-causing microbes.

CWC has already received our first two Western Fence Lizards of the year. As we head into one of our busiest seasons, we are ready to admit many more. To keep our reptile friends healthy (and out there contributing to the health of humans), keep cats inside and consider alternatives to pesticides or glue traps in your garden.