



# WildTimes

Winter 2020

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

## Snakes, Friend or Foe?

By Jenn Guess, Senior Wildlife Technician Supervisor

In an average year California Wildlife Center sees up to 150 different species come through our doors. Although most patients are avian and mammalian, we also see a fair share of reptiles. Over the years CWC has admitted eight different species of snakes alone.

Snakes come to CWC for a variety of reasons. Some are caught in garden netting. This usually causes constriction wounds, lacerations, swelling, abrasions, and in the worst cases, death. Others are caught in glue traps, which can cause emaciation, dehydration, and abrasions (and death, unless we remove them). Glue trap snakes usually have a good prognosis if brought to CWC early enough. Some snakes are hit by cars, which can cause severe trauma to various parts of the face/body, and most of the time are fatal. Unfortunately, we also see snakes that have been intentionally harmed by the public, usually out of misplaced fear.

Snakes in the Southern California area do not eat anything bigger than a ground squirrel. Because of this, snakes would rather retreat from confrontation, but will become defensive if threatened. The vast majority of snake bites in humans occur because a person tries to capture or kill a snake. When left alone snakes present little to no danger to people.

Snakes are a very important part of the ecosystem. They are both predator and prey. Snakes help keep rodent populations in check. Without predators, rodent populations (and the diseases they can carry) quickly get out of control. Snakes are also an important food source for many large raptors, some mammals, and even other snakes. Knowing a little bit about snake habits and habitats can help everyone coexist peacefully. Snakes tend to hibernate in dens over winter. They will venture out in spring when the daytime temperatures reach about 60 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. In the early spring snakes will be active at any time of the day. Snakes do not like temperatures over 90 degrees Fahrenheit, so during the summer snakes will come out in the cooler hours of dawn and dusk, and sometimes at night.

Snakes like to wait out the hot hours of the day by finding cool, dark places to hide. Piles of cinder blocks, plastics, wood, branch clippings, overgrown vegetation, etc. provide the perfect shelter for snakes. Keeping your yard free of clutter and debris will help deter them from staying on your property. Piles of debris also attract rodents. If you have a rodent population around your house, then you will also attract snakes. Never use poison to try to control rodent populations. Poisons may kill some rodents, but it unfortunately kills off the predators that keep rodent populations under control.

Since snakes are a natural part of the Southern California ecosystem, there is a chance that you will cross paths with one. If you see a snake slithering through your property, bring pets inside and leave the area for an hour. There is a good possibility that the snake is just passing through. Always be careful when lifting up objects that are left outside unattended. Although the vast majority of snake species in Southern California are harmless, it is always better to err on the side of caution when dealing with snakes. Give them a wide berth, and they will do the same for you.



A Gopher Snake who had been caught in netting being tube fed  
Photo by Heather Patrice Brown



A San Diego Night Snake caught in glue trap  
Photo by Jenn Guess

**Inside:** Slow Down for Wildlife, Gifts that Support CWC, Cedar Waxwings: A Welcome Winter Visitor

## Slow Down for Wildlife

By Heather Brown, Development Manager

As I drove south on Las Virgenes on the morning of August 18, I passed a very sad sight: three raccoons who had been hit by a car, lying in the road. This was not the first of these incidents I had encountered on my daily drive to work.

Las Virgenes/Malibu Canyon is no stranger to wildlife hit and runs since it is a major artery between the Pacific Coast Highway and the 101. In 2018, it made the news when one of the local mountain lions, P-23, was hit and killed.

According to a study completed by UC Davis, there are 7,000 collisions with wildlife in the State each year, but this study only looked at large species like deer and coyotes. A second research project by Culture Change revealed as many as 400 million animals nationally are killed by vehicles annually, not counting the insects that hit windshields.

So far this year, California Wildlife Center has treated 28 animals who have been hit by cars. The number does not incorporate patients with suspected but unconfirmed auto injuries. These cases include hawks, owls, rabbits, squirrels, coyotes, snakes, opossums, and ducks. Only half have survived due to the severity of their injuries, which may include head trauma, bone fractures, lacerations, soft tissue damage, and internal bleeding.

One patient, a juvenile Red-Tailed Hawk, was hit by a car on the 101 freeway on February 18. He had suffered a collar bone fracture, a nose abrasion, eye trauma, a wound to his back, and a chest injury. California Wildlife Center staff had to repair this last laceration surgically. The other wounds were treated topically, and the Hawk had to sport a wing bandage while his collar bone healed. After a week, staff noticed the hawk was improving, and two weeks later, he was well enough to move to an outside aviary for physical therapy to regain his strength. A little over a month after he arrived at CWC, the Red-Tailed Hawk returned to the wild. We can only hope he has learned to fly higher over roads and freeways.

The easiest way to prevent unnecessary wildlife injuries and deaths due to automobile collisions is to slow down, especially if you are driving in areas known to have lots of animals such as canyon and mountain roads. Pay attention to road signs that warn about possible crossing locations. Many species are more active at dawn and dusk, so be alert, particularly since the reduced and changing light can make it more difficult to see.

If you hit a wild animal or see one in a collision and they are still alive, contact CWC (310-458-9453), or your local animal control agency for larger animals like deer and coyotes. If you see a deceased wildlife victim of an accident, you can report it to CROS, the California Roadkill Observation System (<https://www.wildlifecrossing.net/california/>). CROS uses the collected data to inform projects to help reduce wildlife collisions.

If we all slow down and keep our eyes open for wildlife, hopefully, we can reduce these avoidable tragedies.



Mule Deer does who are hit by cars in the spring often leave orphaned fawns  
Photo by Cambria Wells



Owls like this Western Screech-Owl are common victims of car collisions  
Photo by Cambria Wells

## Gifts for the Animal Lovers on Your List!

### CWC's Ani-Mall

Shop for face masks, patches, and bumper stickers at CWC's online store: [cawildlife.org](http://cawildlife.org). All proceeds support CWC!

### Animal Sponsorship

Support the care of their favorite animals! Choose from eight different species with sponsorships starting as low as \$50. You may also add a plush replica of the animal for an additional cost. Your gift recipient will receive:

- Certificate of Sponsorship with the recipient's name
- Full-color photo of the animal
- Species fact sheet

Sponsor an Animal today at [cawildlife.org](http://cawildlife.org)

### Tribute Donations

Support wildlife in memory or honor of your loved one by making a tax-deductible donation to CWC in their name. Your recipient will receive a letter informing them of your generous gift!



Squirrels are one of eight species you can sponsor  
Photo by Brittany Moser

## Shop to Help Wildlife!



Help provide food for our patients when you buy food for your family  
Photo by Cambria Wells

### Amazon Smile

Amazon will donate a percentage of your qualifying purchase to CWC when you shop through AmazonSmile. Your holiday shopping can support wildlife! Learn more at [cawildlife.org](http://cawildlife.org).

### Ralphs Community Reward

Ralphs Grocery will donate a portion of the proceeds from your purchase to California Wildlife Center! If you already have a Ralphs Rewards Card, log in to [www.ralphs.com](http://www.ralphs.com). Click on 'Create Account' and follow the easy steps. Click on Community Rewards – Enroll and search for California Wildlife Center.

## Donate to Support Wildlife

### Make a Cash Contribution

Your tax-deductible donation provides direct support for the sick, injured, and orphaned wildlife in CWC's care. Donate today at [cawildlife.org](http://cawildlife.org)

### Become a Conservation Circle Member

If you would like to get a closer look at the work being done at CWC and are willing to go that next step for wildlife, consider joining the Conservation Circle. Members receive exclusive invitations to witness first-hand the care our wild patients receive. Join today at [cawildlife.org](http://cawildlife.org)

### Employer Donation Matching

Double the impact of your contribution! Many employers match employee contributions to organizations like California Wildlife Center. Ask your HR representative if your company has a matching gift program. They can contact CWC at [heather@cawildlife.org](mailto:heather@cawildlife.org)

### Donate an Item from our Amazon Wish List

Search for "California Wildlife Center" under Wish Lists on Amazon.com. The items on our list will help us in our care of our wild patients. Like a registry, these items can be purchased and shipped directly to CWC!

### Gift Drive

Collect items from our Wish List! We always need items like bleach, paper towels, and pillowcases. Your donation is tax-deductible! This is a great project for scouts, schools, and community groups. To see the complete wish list, visit [cawildlife.org](http://cawildlife.org)

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## Cedar Waxwings: A Welcome Winter Visitor

By Cori Carlson, Administrative Assistant

California Wildlife Center admits migratory birds every year. One winter patient is the Cedar Waxwing, named for the waxy red tips on their secondary wing feathers (the feathers that help them get lift) and their fondness of cedar berries. A few other distinctive characteristics are their crested heads and black coloring around their eyes, which looks like a mask. These birds range mostly in the northern half of the United States. They can be found from forest areas to grasslands to suburban areas. Last year, we received 22 of these yellow-bellied birds. So far this year, we have admitted four.



Cedar Waxwing  
Photo by Stephany Lewis

When the birds are at CWC, their diet consists of an assortment of berries and mealworms. When one first arrives, we offer a smorgasbord of berries such as blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, and grapes. Each bird has their preference, so offering a variety of berries allows us to customize each patient's diet. We are also fortunate to have native Toyon bushes on-site that provide our patients with delicious red berries. When the Cedar Waxwings move to outdoor enclosures, we make sure to provide them with branches from Toyon bushes as they would find in the wild.

To help protect Cedar Waxwings, take care to avoid plants with toxic berries. The Nandina shrub, also known as sacred bamboo or heavenly bamboo, produces an extremely toxic red berry. While it is often popular with landscapers, the berries contain cyanide and other alkaloids, which are extremely poisonous to all animals.

At CWC, Cedar Waxwings get a longer acclimation period than other birds between leaving the intensive care unit and moving to an outdoor enclosure because they are more sensitive to temperature changes. Instead of a sudden move to outdoor aviaries, the birds are placed in small, moveable pens when they are ready to leave the hospital. We put them in partial sun during the day and bring them back inside in the evening to help prepare them for life outdoors. During this time, we monitor them carefully. If their appetite decreases or they stop eating, it is a sign of stress, so we slow down the process. Once they have acclimated to the weather, they spend the rest of their rehabilitation time in an outdoor enclosure strengthening their muscles for flight before their release.