



# WildTimes

Fall 2021

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

## A Raven's Journey to Recovery

By Cambria Wells, Wildlife Technician Supervisor

Wildlife rehabilitation is often a story of collaboration. This is even more true when a species requires intensive or specialized care. California Wildlife Center (CWC) has a large service area and is the only facility in Los Angeles County permitted to rehabilitate Ravens and Crows, and therefore receives relatively high numbers of them each year. For that reason other wildlife rehabilitators will sometimes transfer young corvids, the family name encompassing Crows, Ravens, Jays, and Magpies, to join our groups of fledglings as a measure to prevent them becoming habituated to human care. One of these birds has been a favorite patient of CWC staff and volunteers this summer. Originally found in a rural area in Central California, Common Raven 21-2166 was treated for a fracture of his tibiotarsus, a leg bone. Once stable enough to travel, he hitched a ride with transporters to his destination here at our facility for long term care.



Common Raven 21-2166 with his "buddy"  
Photo by Cambria Wells

Since 21-2166 was already an older bird and at risk of habituation to human care, staff paired him as quickly as possible with other Raven "buddies." Then, the group was set aside in a smaller enclosure for evaluation in order to ensure they would be self-feeding and free of parasites before getting access to a large flight pen. 21-2166 quickly became known for his sweet habit of asking for food like a younger bird, not for himself, but to feed to his new friends. This highly affectionate and social Raven thrived in the presence of his own species, allowing us to provide care while keeping his behaviors closer to that of a bird being raised in a wild setting.

In the wild, corvids like Common Ravens and American Crows spend their days in activity foraging for food, engaging in complex social behaviors with their family group, and interacting with other species. They are known to raid nests, scavenge for carrion, craft and use tools, and even steal food from other foraging animals in order to survive. 21-2166 and his "buddy" were provided large numbers of objects to investigate, manipulate, and destroy to ensure they would focus on enrichment and learn skills for survival.

Staff at CWC gives every animal, whether a new intake or a transfer, a full exam on arrival and regular checkups. This is critically important as sometimes new health issues develop in captivity. Raven 21-2166 required extensive care. Before his arrival at CWC and during transfer, he once again fractured his left tibiotarsus. During treatment for that left leg, his habit of leaning on his right led him to develop an early case of "bumblefoot," a form of dermatitis common in birds on perching of the wrong size, which left a wound in the middle of his other foot. By the end of his visit, this Common Raven received not so common care including almost the full range of what CWC can provide; radiographs under sedation, cage rest, pain medication, antibiotics, treatment for gastrointestinal parasites, anesthetized wound care, bandage changes, small aviary residence, large flight pen residence, hand-feeding, daily enrichment, re-wilding and more! If this care were provided in isolation to such a young animal, 21-2166 likely would have been unable to be returned to the wild due to his attachment to humans. At CWC, our summer group of young Ravens means we can avoid that unhappy ending and aim for the best outcome.  
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Providing the medical and husbandry care to get these animals prepared for release is only possible due to the efforts of a large staff and volunteer force whose absolute focus is the return of birds like 21-2166 to their native habitat. Any juvenile Common Ravens and American Crows admitted to CWC are raised by the Orphan Care Unit. As early as 7:30 in the morning we begin their hand-feeding every 45 minutes, and feed until the sun sets in the evening, a total of around 12 hours of feeding. Nestling birds are kept incubated under close observation in the Orphan Care Unit main room until fully feathered. At this point, in order to provide the best environment for them to grow, they are moved up to a special room set aside just for Crows and Ravens. By release, our young corvids have received up to five months of daily attention from veterinary staff, and devoted husbandry care totaling about 2,500 hours of volunteer time. Corvids make up a heavy proportion of our most involved cases, most satisfying releases, and some of the dearest patients to our hearts.



Common Raven 21-2166 admiring his destroyed box  
Photo by Cambria Wells

## A Unique Release for a Unique Seal

By KC Scofield, Stranding Coordinator

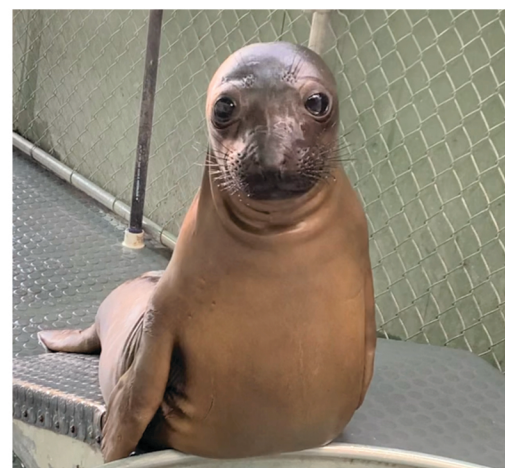
On March 14th, we rescued an underweight Northern Elephant Seal pup at the La Costa Beach Club in Malibu. Once admitted this pup was marked with a blue non-toxic grease marker used to identify individuals while in care, so we began to call him "Blue." These marks are helpful when telling the seals apart, making it easier to accurately track diets, weight gain, medications, and general progress.

We rescued Blue when he was around two or three months old. He was underweight at 86.6 pounds, close to what his birthweight would have been. When leaving the rookery, or breeding area, and living on their own, Elephant Seal pups must teach themselves how to swim and fish. This can lead to trouble learning to recognize and swallow fish, a challenge Blue faced during his stay. His learning process was slower than usual, and he had difficulty digesting fish which explains his underweight status and consequent struggle with gaining weight during his stay. The final hurdle for him was an ulcer on his left eye. Blue had a lot to overcome, and the team quickly set to the task of providing him the best care. He received hydration and nutrition via feeding tubes while he was emaciated. Once ready for solid food, we gave him long, thin, easy to swallow fish and put him through "fish school" to help him learn how to track, dive and hunt fish for himself. We treated him with antibiotics and topical eye medications to help stabilize his eye ulcer.

At 12 weeks, his stay became the longest California Wildlife Center has ever had for a marine mammal! This duration was necessary to ensure any challenges were resolved before release. Before release each individual must pass certain milestones. These include reaching a healthy weight goal, proving they can dive, forage, and compete with others for fish, and they must be recovered from the illness or injury that caused them to strand and be free of any secondary health problems. For Blue, the team wanted certainty that his eye was stable and that he could gain and maintain weight. By the morning of his release, he weighed



Northern Elephant Seal "Blue" waiting to be rescued  
Photo by Joan Zoloth, finder



Blue standing tall before going for a swim  
Photo by Tara Wilson

201 pounds, an average weight gain of 6 pounds per week, bringing him to a healthy weight for a male Elephant Seal pup of his age!

Elephant Seals typically gather onshore twice a year, in the summer for molting and in the winter for breeding, spending most of their time foraging in the open ocean. Due to this seasonal pattern, the length of his rehabilitation, and the now bustling coastline, a beach release was not an option.

It had been two years since the Marine Mammal Team had done an offshore release. This type of release involved traveling via boat out to the Channel Islands just off the coast. At 5am on June 30th the team started our six-hour journey to Santa Rosa Island. More than two dozen volunteers met us on the dock that morning to celebrate everyone's hard work and the achievement of releasing Blue.

With the help of Island Packers Cruises, we were able to release Blue off a boat, close to established colonies throughout the Channel Islands. By bringing him further from the mainland and closer to wild seal populations, we could provide him the best chance for success.



Blue's release from a boat off of Santa Rosa Island  
Photo by Heather Henderson

Through the overcast June morning and less than calm seas, Blue snoozed most of the three-hour boat ride, peeking occasionally at the ocean ahead of him. Once the boat was situated in a calm area next to the island, the kennel door was opened. With a subtle splash, Blue was back in the Big Blue. He surveyed his new environment, taking it all in, and calmly without hesitation swam away from the boat, out into the ocean. Nestled in the Channel Islands National Park and Marine Protected Area, Santa Rosa Island provides plenty of fish and quiet beaches for Blue to grow and become the best beach master he can be!

The Marine Mammal team sincerely thanks our team of volunteers and supporters for their hard work and dedication making this lifesaving work possible.



Blue's attention captured by herring  
Photo by Tara Wilson



# Crows FOR A CAWSE

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## Support Crows for a Cawse today!

This year alone, we have received a total of 262 sick, injured, or orphaned Ravens and Crows who require extremely involved care. As the only facility in Los Angeles County permitted to completely rehabilitate corvids, we can only do this with your support. To donate, please visit our website at [cawildlife.org](http://cawildlife.org), or use the included envelope. Your gift helps to return healthy, rehabilitated corvids to the wild!



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## Basking in the Sun

By Cori Carlson, Administrative Coordinator

A California State Park employee brought a female adult Western Pond Turtle to the California Wildlife Center in late June of this year. Her top and bottom shells were cracked, chunks of shell were missing, and she showed signs of an infection. The ranger found the turtle in the road with injuries consistent with a sudden impact trauma, such as being hit by a car. This was CWC's first turtle patient of the year.



Release back to the wild  
Photo by Spencer Orloff, finder

Western Pond Turtles are California's only native freshwater turtle. The adults grow up to 6 to 8 inches in length, but the baby turtle is only about the size of a quarter. Ranging from the Puget Sound in Washington to Baja California in ponds, streams, lakes and wetlands, these medium-sized turtles have a brown or black upper shell with light specks of color. Their lower shell typically is black and yellow. They often are spotted near water, but they also need places to bask in the sun. Sometimes, the turtles stack themselves on top of one another to keep warm.

After the turtle's injuries were cleaned and the damaged tissue and non-vital parts of the shell removed, our veterinarian prescribed anti-inflammatory medication and antibiotics to help the infected area heal.

CWC always works hard to provide our patients with an environment that closely resembles their home. In this case, our technicians set up a turtle pond outside our intensive care unit. Each day the turtle was taken out to her pond and each evening she would return to her enclosure furnished with heat lamp in the ICU. Her outdoor retreat was especially important because this species of turtle only eats underwater. They are omnivores, eating insects, fish, tadpoles, frogs, algae, lily pads, tule and cattail roots.

While birds, fish and bullfrogs are the main predators of Western Pond Turtles, they also face other threats such as habitat destruction, disease, fire, flooding, and droughts. The loss of only a few adults can have a significant impact on the population, because the female turtles do not reach maturity until close to 10 years of age.

Over time, new, healthy tissue grew repairing the damage to the shells and allowing the turtle to return to the wild 22 days after being admitted. The same California State Park employee released the turtle back into the Santa Monica Mountains to bask in the sun, safely away from the roads.