



WildTimes

Spring 2022

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

A Great Horned Owl Flies Free

By Guthrum Purdin, DVM

This Great Horned Owl was brought to CWC from West Valley Animal Control one afternoon back in late September. There was no history to go with the transfer, why she had come into care was unknown. What was immediately apparent however, were abrasions on the bird's cere (the base of the upper beak) and, although the talons could still grip, she was dehydrated and unable to stand. The wounds were cleaned and subcutaneous fluid given to rehydrate the bird.

In addition, nonsteroidal anti-inflammation medication was started. This was done to control possible pain, but even more importantly because head trauma was strongly suspected. A head injury, such as being hit by a car, can cause inflammation and swelling in the brain. Symptoms of brain swelling can take a few days to manifest, and that's what we saw happening to this owl. Although able to stand on the second day in care, she was staring off into the distance as if unaware of what was going on around her, until she was actually touched by a caregiver. Her right wing was drooping with no injuries found by palpation or x-rays.



Great Horned Owl
Photo by Guthrum Purdin, DVM

Then, two days later, she started spinning in circles. This worsened over the next few days. At any stimulus, the owl would start turning to the left, spinning repeatedly, over and over. Her pupils were very different sizes (called anisocoria), the left much larger than the right. The right eye would focus on moving objects, but the left would not, seemingly blind. Things were looking grim for the owl, and we feared she was not going to recover. When our veterinarian looked at her, he found the eyes were structurally normal, with no outward sign of injury; the problem seemed completely associated with her brain. Head trauma can cause "central blindness," where the eyes are structurally normal, but there is damage to the visual centers of the brain. More promisingly, the owl would occasionally stop spinning and make the loud "beak clattering" noise that Great Horned Owls do to show aggression and as a warning to strangers to "back off!" Despite her cerebral compromise, she was self-aware enough to warn her caregivers to be wary. Now, when touched, she'd turn to bite. She always missed but was determined to try!



Photo by Guthrum Purdin, DVM

Treatment continued, and we monitored her carefully. If she could see people, she'd start spinning, but if left alone, would stop and relax. After about two weeks, the owl was eating on her own, no longer requiring being hand fed. Her eyes still had anisocoria, but less dramatically. When trying to bite, the owl now could snap down on what she aimed at—caregivers beware! The drooping wing had been wrapped until now, but that was no longer needed.

A few days later, the owl was moved to a shady, quiet, small aviary to allow more space and peace for recovery. The owl immediately went up to the low perches provided and settled in. Medication could be given in the food, and she was left in peace as much as possible. The owl still spun to the left when approached on the first day in the small aviary, but finally stopped for good by day two.

Inside: What Was ICU Up To In 2021?, Enclosure Expansion, Training Program & more!

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Improvement was gradual. Initially, flight was unusually noisy when taking off. This is a serious problem for owls. They rely on flying almost silently when hunting. Owls have specialized feathers that allow them to fly noiselessly. This enables them to descend on their prey without being detected. For this to work, the wings must be held at the proper angle. As this owl slowly regained normal use and positioning of her wings, flight became stronger and quieter. She initially would tire quickly after being moved to a large, flight training aviary. Staff and volunteers would go out and gently encourage flying, thus building up her strength and endurance.

It took weeks, but her pupils returned to normal. The owl was able to avoid objects placed in the aviary, fly silently, and land normally. But could she see well enough to hunt? During a "live prey test," the owl swooped down, catching her dinner immediately after staff closed the aviary door. Feeding herself would be no problem; she was ready at last to return home! After nearly two months in care, this Great Horned Owl was returned to where she had originally been found.

When she first arrived, it really looked like the owl wouldn't make it. Thanks to our dedicated staff and volunteers using their experience and attention to detail, this bird was given every opportunity to improve. Thanks also to the owl herself, for her fierceness and resilience. She's out there somewhere right now, living wild and free.

What Was ICU Up To In 2021?

By Jenn Guess, Development Manager

2021 was quite a year here at California Wildlife Center (CWC). This past year we had 4,013 animals come to our facility. Our Wildlife Technicians are directly responsible for the care of our patients and every patient that came through our doors was assessed by the technicians in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Animals were carefully examined to determine the best course of action for rehabilitation. Sometimes it was as simple as providing fluids and moving the patient to our Orphan Care Unit for supportive care. For adult animals, it was often more complex.

Our ICU technicians didn't stop after the initial intake exam. They were responsible for the daily care and rehabilitation of thousands of patients during 2021. This was a huge undertaking, especially considering that we continued to operate with minimal help due to the persistence of Covid-19. Our technicians provided extensive wound care, splinted fractures, and administered a complex array of medications to treat infections, reduce swelling, and provide pain management.

Coronavirus did not slow down the influx of new animals showing up each day. Our busiest day was May 31st, where ICU technicians received 42 new patients in one day. The second busiest day was April 26th, with 40 new patients. We always know that Spring and early Summer are the most hectic months here at CWC. From April through June we admitted 1,771 patients, 44% of all animals received for care in 2021. Overall, we saw an increase in the number of patients from 2020. We admitted over 200 more patients in 2021, compared to the previous year. Since opening our doors in 1998, the need for care has increased steadily every year except 2020 (likely due to the arrival of Covid).

Technicians saw a variety of animals this past year, with 160 different species making their way through our doors. The five most common patients that the ICU technicians examined were, in decreasing order, Eastern Fox Squirrels, Mourning Doves, House Finches, Mallards, and American Crows. Some of the more uncommon species were a Red-breasted Sapsucker, Lesser Scaup, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Western Pond Turtle, and an American White Pelican.



Photo by Cambria Wells



Photo by Brittany Moser



Photo by Jenn Guess

Now that it's Winter, the ICU technicians are eagerly preparing for the next busy season. In addition to an endless list of smaller tasks, they are deep cleaning the ICU kitchen, repairing enclosures, and reorganizing supplies, all while continuing to perform daily intake exams and care for existing patients on site. It's a job that is never done, and CWC is very fortunate to have a staff of dedicated technicians who are up for the challenge.

Enclosure Expansion Excitement at CWC

By Denys Hemen, Hospital Manager



Photo by Denys Hemen



Photo by Denys Hemen

Spring and summer are fast paced and exciting at CWC. Patients pour in through the doors and we never know what surprises await us each day. This time of year, all our focus is on the thousands of wild animals we receive that need our help. But as fall arrives, our patient load drops, and we can focus on other things like construction and remodeling. This year, we may have overdone it a little! My hardworking partner Brett and I have three major enclosures to construct and a kitchen/laundry room to create. Just writing about them makes me exhausted.

Our first project is a 4ft wide and 40ft long outdoor enclosure that allows our raptor patients some privacy away from humans while still recovering from what ails them. Divided into five 8ft x 4ft holding areas, this enclosure is a middle step between being in a small enclosure inside our clinic and going into a large aviary. It allows us to continue to medicate if needed but at the same time allow for fresh air, sunshine, more room to move around, and freedom from humans' constant presence. The funding for this project was provided by Third District Supervisor, Sheila Kuehl.

Up next is an aviary complex that includes a 32ft x 8ft x 8ft songbird aviary and a 20ft x 8ft songbird aviary that can be divided into up to 5 separate enclosures. They will be bright and airy, complete with a roosting area, privacy walls, and plenty of room for perching. Most of the wood used in this project once covered the windows of Los

Angeles businesses during the social justice protests of last summer. This donated wood saved us hundreds of dollars and kept good lumber out of landfills. Our smaller current songbird aviary complex will be torn down to make room for our new 20ft x20ft mammal enclosure that will house bobcats, coyotes, and foxes!

Last but not least, we will be converting an underutilized space (very rare for CWC!) inside the building into a much needed, second laundry and food prep area.

If you want to donate to support any of these projects, check out our website at www.cawildlife.org. You can also purchase construction related items by clicking the "support us" tab on the website and look for our Amazon Wishlist. Time for a nap! Take care y'all.

San Fernando Valley Audubon Society In Action

CWC is grateful to the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society for their support of our work and our mission to take responsibility for the protection of native wildlife through rehabilitation, education, and conservation. Their generous contribution helped cover the cost of a variety of items including, but not limited to, very specialized diets for our patients, medical supplies, enclosure setup, and cleaning supplies. CWC is thankful for the support of the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society, and all donors, in order to continue helping wildlife in need. This gift from the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society's members has made a tremendous contribution in our efforts to help birds in need.



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Marine Mammal Department Enhances the Training Program for Volunteers

By Heather Henderson, Marine Program Manager

CWC responds to hundreds of distressed marine mammals along the Malibu coastline each year, performing rescues when appropriate. The strength and backbone of the program stems from our team of devoted volunteers. Without their countless hours of demanding work, our ability to efficiently investigate reports and care for in-house patients would be hindered. Thus, the higher the skillset of team volunteers, the greater the number of distressed animals that can be offered assistance. Additionally, the experience becomes more rewarding for the individual.

Early fall 2021, we were ecstatic to rollout our new training program for marine mammal volunteers! Historically there was a protocol manual to read and opportunistic observation of skills. Now, for a dozen of the more complex topics, we are implementing interactive training sessions followed by videos for review of each topic to help maintain skills during the slower "off-season". The first topic covered was RESCUE. This three-hour on-site session included a group presentation followed by skills practice on location. Running drills at the beach while using the same equipment implemented during live animal calls enabled the re-creation of real-life scenarios.



Photo by Kristilee Kodis

One of the most important variations we practiced was how to adjust a response technique for different species. There are five species of pinnipeds (seals and sea lions) in SoCal. Most years we see three or four of them, however in 2021 our team responded to all five pinniped species, which only happened one other time in our 23-year history. The marine mammal rescue team also responded to eighteen other species including dolphins, marine birds – shore birds and offshore pelagic birds and a sea turtle. Having the opportunity to practice these augmentations in approach is invaluable to prepare new team members for challenges to come, while refreshing skills for veterans and forging bonds between them.

With the success of our fall rollout, the marine program staff is looking forward to continuing in 2022.