



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

June 3, 2022



Injured dove in center
Photo by Britt Moser



Dr. Purdin performing physical therapy
Photo by Jenn Guess

A Young Mourning Dove's Ongoing Recovery

Mourning Doves are a common backyard bird in Southern California. The adults are easily recognizable by their blue eyeliner, brown/tan bodies, and black spots on their wings. The bird's call is a soft cooing that sounds "mournful," giving the dove its name. Mourning Doves can be found foraging for seed on the ground, perched on phone wires, and roosting in trees.

Mourning Doves make simple nests out of loose sticks and pine needles. The female will lay two eggs, and both the male and female will incubate the eggs for about 14 days. After hatching the parents tend to the young birds for 2 weeks, until they are ready to fledge from the nest. The fledglings will then spend 7 to 14 days on the ground, learning to fly from the ground up.

The fledgling stage is a dangerous time in any young bird's life. Although they are vulnerable to native predators, fledgling birds evolved to evade and hide from these threats. Unfortunately, the most successful and stealthy hunters of fledgling birds are non-native house cats. Cats were brought to the Americas by settlers from Europe, and birds from the United States are not equipped to elude these predators. In the US, cats kill about 2.4 billion birds every single year.

On May 16th, a young Mourning Dove was brought to CWC after being attacked by 3 cats. The finder quickly took the bird away from her pets, contacted CWC, and was advised to bring the dove in for care. The patient had a broken bone in their left wing, multiple wounds on their left wing, and a large laceration along the left leg. Technicians stabilized the dove, secured the broken wing, cleaned the wounds, and administered various medications including antibiotics and pain medications.

The next day Dr. Purdin assessed the small dove's multiple injuries. He carefully closed the large wound on the leg with sutures (stitches) and created a specialized splint for the broken wing. Over the next couple weeks Dr. Purdin continued to closely monitor the patient's condition. The dove improved and eventually the splint was ready to be removed. Once the splint was taken off the dove was in need of physical therapy on the wing to help regain their full range of motion. Dr. Purdin continues to assess the young bird every few days to gently extend the wing and monitor the progress of the left leg wound.

The fledgling dove is currently in our Orphan Care Unit, with other doves of the same age. The patient will soon be moved to a large outdoor enclosure to build up flight muscles and become acclimated to the weather.



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This dove was lucky to survive the attack, but most birds are not so fortunate. CWC receives up to 350 cat caught patients every year and the vast majority succumb to their injuries. One of the most important ways people can help young birds is by keeping cats indoors. If you find an animal that has been caught by a cat, contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center as soon as possible. Place the animal in a warm, quiet, dark location, and do not release them back into the wild even if they look healthy. Cats have the ability to inflict very small wounds that are unable to be seen with human eye. All cat caught animals must be placed on strong antibiotics to fight off infection from the bacteria harbored in cats' mouths and on their claws.