



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

July 15, 2022



Photo by Jenn Guess



Photo by Sydney Adams

Lounge Lizard

If you have ever dropped off an animal at CWC in the spring or summer, you most likely have noticed the thriving Western Fence Lizard population on the property. Staff and volunteers will often see these small reptiles basking in the sun on rocks or scurrying along the paths between our enclosures. Western Fence Lizards (also called “blue belly lizards”) are a common sight throughout all of the Western United States. These small reptiles can be identified by their tan to dark brown backs and light bellies with blue streaks. The males of the species have much more vibrant blue hues on their abdomen, and they frequently do push-ups in front of the females to show off their “blue bellies.” This flash of color is also a territorial sign to ward off other males in the area.

It is rare to see Western Fence Lizards during the coldest months of the year, but they do not technically hibernate in the winter. Instead, they experience a period of brumation. Hibernation is when a warm-blooded animal experiences a period of dormancy. Hibernating animals will consume extra calories and put on weight before significantly reducing their body temperature and metabolic rate. They will enter a state of low biological activity, which for some species can last up to seven months. Brumation, on

the other hand, is a dormant period reptiles enter into when temperatures drop below 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

Lizards are cold-blooded and rely on the heat from the sun to increase their body temperature and metabolic rate. When temperatures drop in the winter, their metabolic rate and other bodily functions naturally slow down and they enter into a state of suspended animation. These animals will frequently “wake up” during brumation and need to eat and drink small amounts of food and water to survive this period of time.

The scales of the Western Fence Lizard are relatively large and spikey compared to their body size. They use these pointy scales when they are hiding from predators. When a lizard feels threatened, they will run into a crevice and puff up their body. The scales will push against the surfaces, creating shapes that are similar to barbs, that make it almost impossible for any predator to pull the lizard from their hiding place. These animals are also exceptional climbers and will often avoid predators by jumping onto a tree and going around the trunk, and staying out of sight. Western Fence Lizards are not aggressive but will sometimes bite if they are captured.



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Unfortunately, none of these evasion techniques worked for one specific Western Fence Lizard. On June 30th, an adult male lizard was attacked by a cat in Chatsworth, California. The finder was able to transport the injured animal to our facility, and technicians quickly assessed the injuries. The lizard had trauma around his right eye and multiple lacerations on his left thigh. He was otherwise healthy, and in very good body condition. Technicians cleaned and dressed the wounds and administered antibiotics, anti-inflammatories, and pain medication. He was set up in a terrarium in the ICU and offered a selection of bugs from which to choose. This lizard is particularly fond of crickets and will nimbly chase them around his enclosure. When he is not running after crickets, he is often found lounging under the basking light. In the wild, UV light from the sun is essential to lizards for the production of vitamin D3, the absorption of calcium, appetite stimulation, and warmth. While at CWC we provide lizard patients with a specialized UV light and various areas in the enclosure so they can choose to go towards the heat and UV rays, or retreat to a cooler area.

After two weeks in care, the wounds around the lizard's right eye have completely healed and the lacerations on his left leg have almost resolved. Thanks to the hard work from the ICU staff and volunteers, this lizard will soon be returned to the wild.

If you find an injured lizard, place them in a box with airholes and keep them in a warm, quiet, dark location until you are able to get ahold of your local wildlife rehabilitation center.