



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

August 12, 2022



Photo by Guthrum Prudin, DVM

A Bobcat's Odyssey

By Guthrum Prudin, DVM

Take a look at this cool cat! He's a bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) and his story involves quite an odyssey. The first impression from the picture is of a wild king, surveying his domain. Look closer. He's fit, in great condition, well-groomed and "dressed to the nines" in his furry coat. He wasn't always this way. When first seen, he had been hit by a car in Calabasas: bloody, bones broken. It required a lot of caring people from different organizations and a lot of hard work over many weeks to get him put back together and looking so ready for action.



Photo by Jenn Guess

The story began in March when an officer from Agoura Animal Care and Control brought the battered wild cat to a veterinary emergency hospital. The staff there took on this critical and unusual patient, making sure he got the medications he needed to survive, and arranged to have him transferred to the Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network. By this point, the cat was alert but clearly badly injured.

Most obviously, the right humerus (the upper front leg), was shattered and unstable at the midpoint of the bone. Once sedated, he was found to have broken ribs and a bruised lung, plus fluid in the abdomen, among other injuries. Fortunately (if that's the right word after being hit by a car), the joints were intact, and the fracture site was "closed" (no open wound and no bone fragments exposed). The leg was wrapped, meds prescribed, other problems treated (including tapeworms) and the cat was given time to stabilize before

the next phase of treatment could begin.

A board-certified veterinary surgeon from a specialty service was called upon next. They faced the task of reconstructing the splintered humerus. This was accomplished via insertion of a metal rod into the bone to provide stability and a metal plate screwed in place to hold it all together while the bone healed. The long surgical incision was closed with specially designed staples, an effective closure technique that has the advantage of shortening the time under anesthesia, plus it strongly holds the incision closed, and is easily removed after healing is done.

Back at the rehabilitation center, medications were provided in the daily food ration. Even as hurt as he was, this cat did not like being close to people. For rechecks, the bobcat had to be sedated using a blow gun dart



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to be safely handled. Restless at night, he tore the netting off the walls of his enclosure. Happily, bobcats heal fast, and the metal pin was removed in late May. By this time, he had put on enough weight that feeling his formerly broken ribs was not easy, but using x-rays, it could be seen that all the broken bones were now healed. There was still some irritation to the shoulder joint where the pin had been placed, but this soon resolved.

Now what the bobcat needed was a large, secure enclosure to exercise. A place with enough climbing opportunities that he could give himself a little physical therapy by climbing & jumping in a protected space. This is where California Wildlife Center (CWC) comes in. We see a fair number of “mesopredators” (mid-sized predators) like bobcats and coyotes each year, so it was natural for Santa Barbara to reach out to us & ask if we could take on the recovering kitty. The only problem being we had no more room! All our predator caging was filled with other patients. CWC’s hospital manager Denys Hemen was undaunted. Knowing we were likely to need more predator space, he had already built a foundation for a new enclosure, little dreaming how soon it would be in demand! Monitoring his improving condition determined when the cat would need the exercise habitat and right on time, Denys had constructed a secure, airy enclosure with diverse hide boxes, logs, and elevated platforms. Perfect for a restless wild cat to use to exercise and recuperate.

The bobcat arrived at CWC early in July. After a medical check-up determined he was indeed in good condition, he was released into his new (temporary) home. Well, not so much released as the door of the crate was opened....as long as there were people nearby, the cat was absolutely not coming out. Left in peace and checked a little while later, he was up on a high platform, looking down, growling, looking like he might like to pounce on anyone entering the enclosure. Fierce indeed!

So it went for the next few weeks. Anytime anyone came by to check or bring food, the bobcat was looking surly on a high perch or tucked away in a carrier or hide box. The nighttime video camera told a different story! There are night-vision videos of the cat running & jumping, batting his food up into the air just like a house cat with a fluffy toy mouse. Doing a final check of the cat’s mobility, a water hose was lightly sprayed near his hideout. He wanted no part of that, came rushing out of the crate, climbed onto a log and jumped quickly from perch to perch, higher and higher, until reaching his favorite platform. Putting weight evenly on all his feet, surgical scars healed over and covered with fur, well-muscled and energetic, this cat was ready and willing to go home!

As it happens, the original accident was only a few miles from CWC. It’s important that wild animals be returned to the spot where they were found. There they know where food and water can be found, where they can safely spend their days, and where neighboring territories begin and end. The release team used a rolling cart to wheel the bobcat’s cage up a steep hill along a grasslands trail to a stand of trees. The cage was opened...and again, cat was not trusting anything humans wanted him to do. It took a little waiting and a little cage jostling, but then the long-awaited moment arrived. From zero to gone, a furry thunderbolt burst out, ran through the trees, ran through the grass, and was free, disappearing over the ridge crest without a single look back.