



# California Wildlife Center

## Patient of the Week

### September 9, 2022



Photo by Jenn Guess

## Five Young Mockingbirds Get a Second Chance at Life

Northern Mockingbirds are a common sight within suburban yards and farmlands across the United States. These grey and white birds prefer habitats with low, dense shrubs and short grasses, but can also be found along desert streams and thickets. Their diet consists of about fifty percent insects and fifty percent berries. In the spring and summer, mockingbirds will eagerly forage on bugs but when the weather becomes colder, and insects are harder to find, they will consume a significant number of berries and wild fruits.



Photo by Jenn Guess

Mockingbirds are well known for their complex repertoire of songs. The average mockingbird can sing over 200 songs, and this number tends to increase with the age of the bird. Most of their songs are direct repetitions of other bird calls, but mockingbirds are also able to create their own original melodies. Males sing louder and more frequently than females. In fact, females tend to avoid singing during the summer unless the male is away from the nest. Females sing most frequently during the fall, when attempting to establish a winter territory. Male mockingbirds use their impressive catalog to find a mate and defend their territory. These birds are also known to sing at night, with the most common nighttime vocalists being unmated males.

The breeding season for mockingbirds can start as early as February in warmer climates and extend through August. Pairs are monogamous for the entire season, and some couples have been found to mate for years. Female mockingbirds will lay between two and six eggs in the nest (this grouping is called a clutch), and both parents will help tend to their offspring. Once the first set of young birds are able to fly and find food on their own, the mated pair will then lay a second clutch of eggs. If food is plentiful and conditions are favorable, the pair can lay up to four clutches of eggs during the breeding season.

The survival rate of young mockingbirds is somewhere between 20 and 40 percent. Their nests are often predated, but the young can also expire from disease or poor parenting. Here at CWC we see about 100 Northern Mockingbirds come through our doors each year and the vast majority of these patients are nestling and fledgling birds in need of help. This was the case for five young mockingbirds that are currently being cared for in our Orphan Care Unit (OCU). Two of the birds (from two different cities) were each attacked by a cat while they were on the ground learning how to fly. Another patient in the group was thrown out of their nest by a crow. A member of the public intervened before the crow was able to take off with the bird.



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The remaining two mockingbirds are siblings who were both found dehydrated, lethargic, and laying on the ground under their nest. It is unclear what caused these two birds to leave the nest, but it is possible that they were orphaned and came to the ground looking for food.

Each of these five mockingbirds are currently thriving in OCU. Luckily, the patients who were cat caught only suffered minor injuries, the bird who was attacked by a crow quickly recovered, and the siblings regained their strength after a brief time of supportive care. These mockingbirds will soon transition into a small outdoor aviary where they will be closely monitored by OCU technicians. Once the patients have acclimated to the weather and they are no longer in need of hand feedings, they will be moved into a large aviary where they will build up their flight muscles prior to release.

If you find an injured or orphaned Northern Mockingbird, gently place them in a box lined with a paper towel or tea cloth and contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center for help.