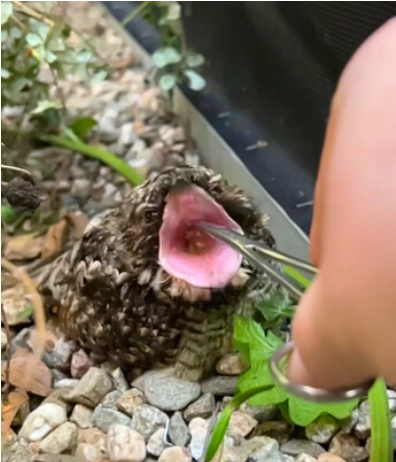




California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

April 21, 2023



Common Poorwill eating a cricket

Common Poorwill

Here at CWC we often receive phone calls from concerned members of the public about baby owls on the ground. Although most calls correctly identify the species, there are a few cases where people unknowingly mistake an adult Common Poorwill for a young owl.

Common Poorwills are a species of nightjar. They are found in North and Central America, ranging from southwestern Canada and the western United States, through Mexico and Central America. Poorwills are about the size of a dove, and have cryptic plumage with a mottled pattern that provides excellent camouflage which makes them difficult to spot in their natural habitat. They have large, dark eyes and a wide mouth with a short bill.

Poorwills are active at dawn, dusk, and on moonlit nights. This is because they are insectivores and feed primarily on flying insects (such as moths and beetles). They are aerial foragers and capture prey in flight using their wide, large mouths. They also can forage on the ground, picking up insects. During the daylight hours, poorwills will often hide on the ground and rest.

We receive about 15 poorwill patients each year. Most of the time these animals come to us after sustaining an injury, but occasionally we will receive a poorwill after they have been mistakenly picked up during the day while at rest. This was the case for the most recent Common Poorwill who came to CWC. The adult male was taken to animal control and was then picked up by one of our transport volunteers and brought to CWC. Once at CWC hospital staff fully assessed the patient and noted that he was cold to the touch and dehydrated. Although hypothermia can be deadly for most birds, poorwills can enter a near state of hibernation (called torpor) when outside temperatures drop, or their food options are low. Torpor is a physiological state that allows some species to reduce their metabolic rate to conserve energy. During this time, the animal's body temperature drops, the heart rate and breathing slows down, and overall metabolism decreases significantly.

Upon arrival at CWC, the Common Poorwill was rehydrated and then carefully hand-fed a variety of insects every two hours. Once the patient was stable hospital staff was able to assess the poorwill for release, and he was returned to his original location.

If you find an animal that you suspect is injured, contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center as soon as possible for advice. You can do even more to help wildlife by donating at cawildlife.org.