



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

April 7, 2023



Gray Fox shortly after intake

Don't Use Rodenticide, For Fox Sake

Here at CWC we treat over 100 different species of wild animals every year. Some species, like Mourning Doves, we care for in the hundreds. Other species, like Gray Foxes, we might only see a few each year.

The first Gray Fox of 2023 recently arrived at our facility from Los Angeles. The adult female was found lying in the road, weak and lethargic. Once at CWC, hospital staff noticed that she was emaciated and severely dehydrated. Luckily, she was not suffering from any major bodily injuries. Normally when we admit a patient who was found in the road suffering from trauma, we can assume that they were hit by a car. In this case, it is possible that she is suffering from the ill effects of rodenticide poisoning.

Gray Foxes are common throughout most of the United States and Central America. They are omnivores, meaning they eat both plants and animals. Their diet consists mostly of small mammals such as rodents and rabbits, as well as birds, insects, fruits, and berries. They are opportunistic feeders, which means they will eat whatever food is available in their environment. In general, they hunt at night and forage during the day. Foxes are agile climbers and can climb trees to catch prey, but also hunt on the ground using their keen sense of smell to locate small mammals in the underbrush.

In addition to hunting, Gray Foxes may also scavenge for food. They are known to eat carrion, or the remains of dead animals, if they come across it. This means that they are very susceptible to rodenticide poisoning. We see a significant number of patients come to our facility each year suffering from the ill effects of rodenticide. Hawks, owls, bobcats, coyotes, foxes, squirrels, and other rodents are the most common animals we see suffering from the poisons. Anticoagulant rodenticides are toxic substances that are unfortunately commonly used when attempting to control rodent populations. There are two main generations of anticoagulant rodenticides: first-generation and second-generation. First-generation anticoagulant rodenticides were introduced in the 1940s and 1950s. These poisons are less potent than second generation products and require a larger dose to be effective. Even though they are weaker, they are still toxic and can pose a risk to non-targeted species.

Second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides were developed in the 1970s and 1980s. These poisons are much stronger than the first-generation and can accumulate in the tissues of animals that consume them. Rodents who eat second-generation rodenticides will usually be active in the environment for two to three days before succumbing to the toxin. During this time, they tend to be slower and more lethargic than their non-poisoned counterparts and are more easily caught by predators. Foxes who consume poisoned rodents



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will then ingest the toxin. These chemicals work by interfering with the body's ability to produce vitamin K, which is necessary for blood clotting. This disruption leads to internal bleeding, and eventual death.

Unfortunately, there is no cure for rodenticide poisoning. The female fox is currently receiving nutritional support and vitamin K supplements. Although her prognosis is guarded, staff and volunteers are working hard to stabilize the patient. She is eating on her own and is more alert than when she first arrived, which is a good sign. We hope that the fox will eventually recover and be released back to her home in the wild.

If you see a sick or injured fox, keep a safe distance from the animal and contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center for advice. Healthy foxes will avoid human interaction, but they can become aggressive if cornered or are unwell.

You can do even more to help wild animals in need by donating at cawildlife.org!