



# California Wildlife Center

## Patient of the Week

### July 21, 2023



Great Horned Owl

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In June, a Great Horned Owl was admitted into our facility by the West Valley Animal Control after being found injured on the ground. Upon examination, hospital staff determined that the owl was suffering from a traumatic head injury after having been hit by a car. The owl was observed to have bleeding from his mouth and eyes, as well as bruising and swelling on the left side of his head. The owl's outcome remained uncertain for a while as the bleeding continued and he refused to eat. Hospital staff later identified the possible cause of the bleeding to be rodenticide poisoning, as the owl exhibited the effects of anticoagulant compounds found in rodenticides, which interfere with blood clotting.

At CWC, we diagnose rodenticide poisoning based on the symptoms displayed. Patients with uncontrollable bleeding are treated with Vitamin K, which acts as an essential component in restoring normal clotting functions. The duration of vitamin K treatment varies depending on the specific rodenticide involved, as different anticoagulant compounds have different durations of action in the body. Treatment can range from several days to several weeks.

The Great Horned Owl is a formidable bird of prey known for consuming small to medium-sized mammals, such as rabbits, squirrels, skunks, and rodents. Although they are quite large and can have a four-foot wingspan, the average bird only weighs five pounds. These owls are recognized for their distinctive "ear" tufts, which are not actual ears but are used for communication and camouflage. These birds also mate for life, but once the breeding and nesting season ends, the mated pair separates until the following season begins.

We are delighted to inform you that the patient has recently been taken off medication and is now on the path to eventual release!

This patient is one of the many victims we admit each year that we suspect are suffering from rodenticide poisoning. Rodenticide can cause neurological and organ damage, internal and uncontrollable bleeding, and reduced reproductive success. Various types of rodenticides are available on the market, each with devastating effects on animals that consume them.



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Rodenticides are meant to kill rodents, but they don't discriminate and can harm a wide variety of creatures. The toxins work slowly, giving rodents the chance to leave the area where they consumed the poison. This increases the likelihood for them to be eaten by another animal. These poisons build up in the food chain, affecting different levels and causing long-term harm to wildlife.

The negative impact of rodenticide on Great Horned Owls, through secondary poisoning, can result in an increase in rodent populations. This throws off the balance between prey and predators and affects other species that rely on these ecosystems. To minimize the harmful effects of rodenticide on not just Great Horned Owls but all wildlife, CWC strongly encourages the use of natural pest prevention. Some alternatives to rodenticides are catch-and-release traps, sealing entry points, and maintaining cleanliness to discourage rodent activity.