



# California Wildlife Center

## Patient of the Week

### June 2, 2023



Mockingbird's yellow mouth helps their mother know where to deposit food.

### The Multi-Lingual Mockingbird

With the coming of Spring, we also hear many more bird songs than we do in the rest of the year. While most birds are diurnal (meaning active during daylight hours), there is one species in particular that is present in all of North America who may also sing throughout the night—the Northern Mockingbird.

Their Latin name, *Mimus Polyglottos*, alludes to their song, as this bird can mimic many sounds and single birds have been shown to produce over 200 songs, including the sounds of trash trucks, car alarms, and barking dogs. Single male mockingbirds can sing 24 hours a day while seeking a mate. Other mockingbird songs are used to establish territory, especially in the Spring when preparing to build a nest.

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While many may know Harper Lee's book "To Kill a Mockingbird," wherein the bird is a symbol of innocence, the Mayan story of the mockingbird is less well known. In it, the poor drab gray bird is the maid to the beautiful princess Cardinal. The female Cardinal is given expensive singing lessons but she is too lazy to practice. Her parents ask her to give a concert and at it, the Cardinal princess asks her Mockingbird servant to sing in her stead, in a *Cyrano de Bergerac* twist. At the performance, Cardinal princess' father discovers her deception and asks the Mockingbird to sing for the audience, to their delight. And ever since then, the female Cardinal has no beautiful song and the Mockingbird delights in entertaining us all with their beautiful voice.

In 2022, we received 77 Mockingbirds in need of help and so far in 2023, we have received 12. The vast majority of these birds arrive after having been orphaned. Once they arrive in care, each animal is given a thorough examination to ensure that they are otherwise healthy before being transferred to our Orphan Care Unit. There they are fed insects and fruit (their usual fare in the wild) with other supplements to ensure that they are receiving a well-rounded diet. Depending on their age and size, they may be fed once every hour, in order to imitate the pattern that their mothers follow in the wild. Once they are flighted, the birds are placed in larger outdoor aviaries. This enables them to acclimate to temperature changes and to the rising and setting of the sun as well as allows them to have more space to exercise as they refine their movements.



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Mockingbird populations have dropped by 30% since the 1960's, largely due to the increased use of insecticides which kill the primary food source for Mockingbirds. With each life we save, we are helping to negate these activities and we can't do it without you.