



# California Wildlife Center

## Patient of the Week

### May 19, 2023



### Uncommon Raven

One of the most beguiling patients we receive at California Wildlife Center are orphaned corvids. This family includes American Crows, Common Ravens, and Blue Jays. Each year we receive 200-250 corvids, the majority of whom are young orphans. While corvids share many characteristics, one of the most remarkable is their intelligence. In fact, their brain-to-body ratio is only slightly lower than humans and larger than most mammals. Ravens have the largest brains of any bird, regardless of the size of their bodies.

Raven as feathers appeared

Female ravens lay between three to seven eggs, which are slightly smaller than a medium sized chicken egg. Raven eggs are light aquamarine in color with irregular brown splotches on them. The female will then incubate the eggs for 18-21 days (only slightly less than a chicken). Like most birds, they are born blind and bald. They will quickly grow pin feathers. When they first develop, these feathers look like the center shaft of a regular feather. Pin feathers are also known as blood feathers, as blood is coursing through the feather shaft and if broken, these feathers will bleed profusely.

As the feathers grow, the vein recedes to the end/"root" of the feather leaving the visible portion hollow and at the same time, the birds groom away the outer waxy coating of the feather to reveal the soft vane (the colored portion that make up the largest portion of a feather). While it seems like the sudden profusion and protrusion of these pins in a young bird's skin would be painful, the birds show no particular sensitivity to touch during this period

Ravens live in large family groups and raise their young as a community. In fact, they will stay with their parents for up to six months from fledging, compared to a House Finch who might leave the nest permanently after just 12 days. Each raven couple will lay eggs just once a year, compared to Anna's Hummingbirds who may lay eggs up to three times every 12 months.

We suspect that the first young raven of the season was caught by a cat and injured. He arrived for care on May 2nd 2023, just a few days old with multiple wounds. We've been treating him for his injuries and for the parasites our wildlife technicians saw in his feces. Upon intake he weighed just 108 grams, less than a quarter of a pound. He now weighs four times that amount. As an adult, he will grow to be over 2.5 pounds. He is now being raised with other young ravens and will stay with us until he is able to fly, find food, and thrive on his own.



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Despite their name, Common Ravens are often mistaken for the more common American Crow. Ravens are larger than crows, have longer and more diffuse neck feathers and a curved beak. When viewed from below flying, the raven's tail is wedge shaped, whereas the crow's tail is fan-shaped. Crows' most heard vocalizations are the familiar "caw caw." Ravens will make a distinctive "toc toc toc" noise that can be heard from up to a mile away. Both species can imitate other birds and even be taught human words.

If you find a mobile young raven or crow that seems to be abandoned, more likely than not, members of their extended family are likely in the surrounding trees waiting for you to leave. Their family will feed them as they learn to fly and attack predators who try to disturb the young. If, however, the young bird is injured, contact us to verify if the bird should come in for care.