



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

August 25th, 2023



Birds eating in the rain.

What Do Animals Do When It Rains?

With the arrival of Hurricane Hilary, California Wildlife Center was contacted by California Department of Fish and Wildlife to assist another rehabilitator in Orange County who was concerned about flooding their ability to withstand the anticipated deluge. We sent a staffer down and picked up 49 birds for care before the rain began. All of our patients were tucked safely inside enclosures or buildings and seemed unperturbed by the rain. But what happens to all of the animals in the wild when there's 24 hours of rain?



Baby squirrel caught in the rain.

Any animals that can will return to their burrows, hollows, or go underground to wait out the rain. Deer will continue to graze, though at a slower pace, in the rain. Tree squirrels will return to their leaf nests and huddle for warmth. In light rain, adults will use their tails as umbrellas in an attempt to keep their heads dry while seeking food. Ground squirrels will return to their subterranean dens, which are built to protect them during flooding. Skunks, mice, rabbits, and other den animals dig their burrows at angles so that the water gathers away from their resting areas. After the rain has stopped, it's a great time for most animals as the rain will bring up a variety of insects and provide water to the growing grasses.

Birds secrete preen oil, which they use in caring for their feathers. This oil can provide a thin layer of protection and assist in deflecting water. Nevertheless, birds don't often fly when it's raining—not only because of the water droplets, but because of the reduced atmospheric pressure. This decrease makes it more difficult for the birds to gain lift and easily fly. Instead, birds will seek cover and stay stationary when it rains. Birds that use crevices or hollows of trees will tuck themselves away and wait out a storm. This allows them to conserve energy and stay warm. While we may only see the outer plumage of most birds, the feathers closest to their skin (down feathers) trap in heat and help the bird to survive. Birds that are not preparing to migrate do not keep much body fat. They modulate their metabolism, heart rate and body temperature based on temperature, season, and accessibility of food. However, small birds need to eat frequently and during prolonged rainfall such as what we received Sunday, birds need to venture out in order to not starve to death. Wild House Finches can eat half their body weight each day and must seek berries and seeds in order to stay alive. They will quickly dash out from beneath their cover of dense foliage in order to eat.



Northern Mockingbird with soaked wings.

Hummingbirds continue to eat in the rain, as they must eat nearly constantly in



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

August 25th, 2023

daytime in order to survive. They have a special ability to shake off the water as they fly and angle their bodies to avoid droplets. This effort, however, takes even more energy but unlike all other birds, hummingbirds seem to enjoy the rain and use the drops to bathe.

Raptors may hunt in mist or light rain, but in heavy rain their prey is not out, so the hawks, falcons, and owls cannot find food. Like other birds, they can sense a change in the air pressure before a storm arrives and may bulk up in anticipation of a period of time without easy food. Raptors who do not find shelter may be soaked after a rain, and you can see them with wings outstretched in the sun as they seek to dry out and warm up.

And after the rains were over, we received many calls about animals who had been caught in the storm and needed help.

You can help provide shelter for animals in the rain by leaving dead trees where animals may hide and planting shrubs close together to create rain cover. The more and denser vegetation you have, the more places animals may shelter in your yard. You can also hang nesting boxes year-round (build your own or buy) and a variety of animals can use them throughout the year.