



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

September 15th, 2023

Western Kingbird

Last week, a Western Kingbird was brought to CWC from Toluca Lake because they were unable to fly. During the intake exam, our wildlife technicians found the bird had several puncture wounds, was missing their tail feathers, and had dark purple bruising on their rump. With these injuries, we suspect that the bird was caught by a cat. Unfortunately, we receive hundreds of animals each year who have been caught by cats. The best way people can help is to keep cats indoors.

After the patient was given fluids, pain medication, anti-inflammatories, and antibiotics, their wounds were cleaned, medicated and covered. Initially, our technicians observed the bird was not eating. But with some assistance over the next couple of days, the patient began eating a variety of bugs on their own and is now gaining weight. Their wounds are also improving. The missing tail feathers will grow back on their own and have already started coming in. Our technicians are hoping to move the patient to an outdoor enclosure in about two weeks where they will strengthen their flight muscles in preparation for release.

Western Kingbirds are gray-headed flycatchers with yellow bellies and white colored chests and throats. They have a patch of red feathers on the top of their heads, but the burst of color isn't always easy to spot. Western Kingbirds reside in the open valleys and lowlands of Western North America. You will often see them perched on tree branches, fences or even utility lines. Western Kingbirds may help control insect populations. These insectivores mostly catch bugs in-flight but will also swoop down and catch them on the ground. While these territorial birds mainly eat insects, they also occasionally eat berries.



Western Kingbird in small indoor enclosure.



Our technicians provide greenery and perches to mimic our patient's wild environment.



Image of a Western Kingbird's red crown by Ron Dudley, 2014. Accessed via Feathered Photography.

If you find an animal that you suspect has been injured by a cat, here's what you can do to help. Place them in a box with air holes and keep them in a warm, quiet, dark location. Then contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center as soon as possible. Even if they look healthy, cats can inflict very small wounds that are hard to see and can cause infections. That's because cats carry a lot of bacteria in their mouths and on their claws. All animals caught by cats are given antibiotics to fight off infection.