



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

October 13th, 2023



Fawns in our enclosure.



Mule Deer North American western regions.

California Mule Deer Subspecies

California Wildlife Center is excited to continue highlighting the Mule Deer species for the month of October! Mule Deer populations are found western regions of North America. They range from the coastal islands of Alaska, down the Pacific coast to southern Baja Mexico, and from the western Great Plains to western Canada. One easy way to identify this species is by their large mule-like ears that rotate to detect sounds from precise locations. They are also distinguished by their black tipped tail, and antlers that grow upward rather than forward like other subspecies.

There are 11 subspecies of the Mule Deer, with six indigenous to California alone. The California Mule Deer inhabit the westside of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, and the fawns rehabilitated at CWC are part of this subspecies. California Mule Deer prefer to browse hill terrain and wooded areas for shrubs, leaves and berries near a water source. During the day they roam one to two miles to settle in a grassy bedded area under a tree at night. Most of the fawns we receive each year have been alone, separated from their mother, and in need of care and nutrition. Each year we receive between four and eight fawns in need of care. The California Mule Deer is the largest native herbivore in our area. They can easily hide in plain sight as their colors blend in with our vegetation. Sightings of them increase during the late Summer early Fall when food resources are harder to find, and may be seen while driving along canyon roads. This is very common near CWC, especially at dawn and dusk when they are foraging and can easily get injured. CWC is the only facility in Los Angeles authorized to care for Mule Deer fawns, and we receive many calls from surrounding areas reporting injured Mule Deer.

All Mule Deer have some of the same physical characteristics and abilities. All have eyes are located on the side of their heads instead of in front of their face like humans. This position provides 310 degrees of vision, enabling them to better see threats. They also have better night vision than humans and can spot predators from hundreds of meters away. When they are startled, Mule Deer will begin "stotting," which is springing into the air using all four hooves to push off the ground at once. They can impressively jump up to 15 feet away. Orphaned Mule Deer patients often stay at CWC for months at a time while they develop the skills they need to survive on their own in the wild.

The easiest to distinguish male from the female Mule Deer is males grow antlers. Their antlers are bone and made of calcium and phosphorous. Their antlers begin growing in the early spring due to increased daylight and slower production of melatonin. With proper nutrition, they can grow 200 inches in 120 days. During these first four months the antlers are softer and covered with a fuzzy "velvet" fur-like texture. By late summer their antlers reach maximum growth and begin to harden. At this stage, the velvet begins to shrink and dissipate revealing the polished and hardened antlers that they use for weapons during the fall. By winter the antlers start to weaken with a bone fracture at the base, and combined with top-heavy weight the antlers will begin to detach and shed as a whole. After a few weeks the detachment area will heal, and the regrowth process begins almost immediately. Male fawns can begin growing their antlers at four



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months old. The antlers start small and will eventually grow to be more prominent at seven months old. We provide our patients with a complete diet to ensure that each animal is able to develop species specific characteristics.

CWC is located in the Santa Monica Mountains and we are fortunate to see Mule Deer roam through our facility multiple times a year. We know how important it is to have well-trained staff members who are able to provide this sensitive and delicate species with the appropriate care they need in order to thrive in the wild. You can help be a part of their journey by making a donation to our center!