



# California Wildlife Center

## Patient of the Week

### December 22nd, 2023



Abrasion on right talon and bruising at base.

## Red-tailed Hawk

We regularly receive Red-tailed Hawks in need of care. In 2023 we have received 71 of this species, and five are currently in our care. The most common reasons they are brought in are because they have been sitting on the ground unable to stand or fly, lethargic and thin, or any noticeable injuries such as a broken wing, or visible open wounds with matted and bloody feathers.

Due to our location in the upper northwest corner of Los Angeles County, some finders are unable to transport animals directly to us. In those situations, we ask them to bring the patients to their local animal shelters. We have relationships with many of these shelters who will transport rescued animals to CWC, or our volunteers will pick up wildlife from these shelters and bring them to us.



Patient's feet in casts that are changed every three days.

Such was the case for one of our current Red-tailed Hawk patients that was transported to us from our local animal control by a CWC volunteer on November 12th with abnormalities to talons and wrists. This adult arrived with small bumps on their wrists, a small amount of blood present under feathers, as well as scuffed feet. Both feet were abnormally curled in with wear on the outer edge of both talons. Our wildlife technicians suspected the bird was unable to grasp due to the noticeable wear which would indicate the patient was walking or resting on the top of these talons on both feet. Both were swollen and black and red where the talon enters the digit. Since we did not receive previous history of this patient, our hospital surmised that it is possible the hawk suffered minor neurological trauma or spinal trauma, which caused the halluces (the single toe on a bird's foot that is in the rear of the foot and faces the opposite direction to the other toes) to fold under. Once a bird starts to stand on their halluces, it is common for them to stay that way unless they receive medical intervention. After initial examination, our techs soaked both feet in disinfectant diluted with water to cleanse the wounds and attempted to debride any infected tissue. Inflammatory and antibiotic medication was administered, and our technicians created shoe casts to help with healing and keep the bird's feet clean.



Abrasions are healing and getting healthy.

Red-tailed Hawks' talons are important for the bird – not only to allow them to stand and perch, but they are also used to grasp prey. Without their healthy feet, the bird will struggle to catch prey which can result in starvation or even death.

With continued care, the abrasions are healing, and the inflammation is decreasing. Every few days our technicians administer a foot soak and provide wound care. While the hawk is without the foot wraps, our techs place the bird on a perch to test the placement of the digits to check that perching is appropriate with their weight distributed



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Perching successfully in enclosure.

equally. Staff is also monitoring our patient's appetite which is excellent with weight gradually increasing.

After almost one month in our care, the inflammation around the joint is gone, and abrasions are easily debrided after soaking. Our team is wrapping the feet every three days and padding is covering the perches to avoid further abrasions while the feet recover. Once the abrasions are healed and the bird is able to perch successfully, our patient will be moved to an outdoor enclosure to strengthen their flight muscles and slowly begin to acclimate being back in the wild before release.

If you find a wild animal and are unsure if assistance is needed, please call California Wildlife Center (310-458-9453) and we will advise the best steps to take.