



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

February 2nd, 2024



Barn Owl in ICU enclosure.

A Barn Owl on the Mend

On January 11th, a caring member of the public brought in a Barn Owl found in Moorpark who was thin, extremely dehydrated, and lethargic. After initial assessment, our wildlife technicians suspected that this owl was suffering from rodenticide poisoning.

During the intake examination, they also noticed bruising above the left femur which could also result from ingesting rodenticide, as it is an anticoagulant that thins the blood. They also observed an old keel (a ridge on the breastbone, which is a main site of attachment for flight muscles) fracture that appeared to be stable.



Barn Owl moved into outdoor enclosure.

Our technicians immediate concern was to try to reverse the effects of the rodenticide poisoning by starting the owl on a Vitamin K supplement. Anticoagulant rodenticides drain the body of certain proteins used for the blood clotting process. Vitamin K is used to replenish these blood clotting proteins to resume function and avoid internal bleeding. The Vitamin K was administered, and the owl was then placed in an incubator to stabilize their body temperature as it was low. Over the next couple of days, the patient was quiet but active and alert during evaluations and was moved from the incubator once their temperature finally normalized.

While the owl refused to eat independently and was hand fed, after 11 days in care, they finally started eating on their own. The patient's overall health and mentation are improving, and they continue to receive Vitamin K supplements. The owl has an excellent appetite and is gaining weight and becoming more vocal and active. Our team moved the patient to an outdoor enclosure and noted that the bird was perching and immediately began toe-dusting, which is a positive sign that the owl is feeling better. Toe-dusting is a defense mechanism that owls exhibit for their own protection where they lower their head while shaking back and forth.



Barn Owl toe-dusting.

Barn Owls are birds of prey who primarily eat rodents such as mice, small rats, shrews and other small mammals. They hunt at night mostly by flying low over open ground or swooping down from a high perch. Barn Owls are susceptible to rodenticide poisoning because of their preferred diet of small rodents and carrion.

When rodenticide is used to control rodent populations, it unintentionally harms other non-targeted species. Second generation rodenticides were developed so that, when eaten, the rodent wouldn't die right away. This gives them the opportunity to exit the building—obviously ideal for the property owner, however



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the rodent is then slow and easy prey for the animals who eat them. Once the predator consumes the poisoned prey, it will accumulate in their own bloodstream, causing eventual death.

Each year CWC receives many patients who are suspected of being exposed to rodenticide, including various raptors, coyotes, foxes and squirrels to name a few. We strongly advise against using rodenticides and suggest using alternative pest prevention methods to protect wildlife such as picking up fallen fruit from trees, avoid overfilling trash cans, refrain from leaving pet food or water outside, and sealing all possible entry points to prevent access into buildings or structures. By adopting alternative methods, we can effectively manage rodent populations while protecting our native wildlife.

The Barn Owl has an excellent prognosis, and our team is planning to test flight the owl next week to evaluate a release date.

If you find an animal you think may be suffering from rodenticide poisoning, contact CWC at 310-458-9453 and we will advise the best steps to take.