



# California Wildlife Center

## Patient of the Week

May 10, 2024

### Dark-eyed Junco

Baby season is among us and this past week we admitted three Dark-eyed Junco nestlings. The first Junco arrived after being discovered in a cat's mouth, and their presumed nest companions were brought in the following day for the same reason. Of the two birds who survived, one is being treated for a puncture wound to their leg. The nestlings are on a routine dose of antibiotics. Cat saliva contains a lot of bacteria which can cause infection and death from wounds not obvious to the naked eye. The nestlings are being closely monitored and so far, they have exhibited that they are doing well.

The Dark-eyed Junco is a charming, small to medium sized bird with a light-colored beak, grey and white body, and if you look closely, a pin-striped tail. This small bird is mostly ground dwelling and is frequently spotted hopping around, foraging, scratching for food and finding the perfect nesting materials for their ground nests. Juncos engage in an interesting foraging practice called "riding," this is where they will fly to the top of a cluster of grass and ride it to the ground, eating seeds along the way. They are primarily seed eaters but tend to vary their diet around mating season, incorporating insects like beetles, caterpillars, ants and flies in their diets. Due to their seed heavy diet, they gravitate towards forests and wooded areas filled with trees that produce seeds and nuts.

The male Dark-eyed Junco is particularly aggressive and territorial when it comes to mating time. The male bird will often stake out territory prior to the female entering the scene. Once in the picture, male Juncos often exert great effort into making himself noticeable and useful- singing, showing off his tail feathers, guarding the territory and even bringing the females nesting materials. Once mated, the pair are generally monogamous throughout the season and sometimes even longer. The female lays and incubates 3 to 6 eggs for about 2 weeks. Once hatched, both parents work to feed the nestlings until they are ready to fledge about 12 days after that.

The Dark-eyed Junco is very common in North America and can be found in most every state and in most locations that people work, play and commute. The nestlings brought into CWC will hopefully be joining the great outdoors in no time. In about a week, the young Dark-eyed Juncos will be moved into the outdoor aviary. The outdoor space will give the young birds an opportunity to practice their flying and foraging skills. One of the many enrichment activities presented to our aviary patients is a leaf litter bin; these bins are filled with various leaves and bugs and will give the Juncos a chance to practice their hopping and scratching skills that they will rely on once released. CWC is optimistic that the Dark-eyed Juncos will fully recover and gain the strength needed to rejoin their species in song and flight.



Patient after receiving wound care at CWC.



Dark-eyed Junco nestmate.