



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

June 7, 2024

Indigo Bunting



Indigo Bunting patient in care at CWC.



Indigo Bunting perching in outdoor aviary.



Courtesy of Wikipedia; Adult male with mature plumage.

In early May a juvenile male Indigo Bunting fledgling was admitted into our care from a rescuer in West LA. Indigo Buntings are an unusual species at CWC, so our team was eager to get a look at this beautiful bird. What makes the adult male bird of this species stand out is their bright blue plumage. The females often have a more brownish body, with blue accents on their wings and tail. Our patient is still young so his hue is lighter than a mature bunting, though he will eventually grow adult plumage which is a brilliant blue.

After the initial examination, Wildlife Technicians concluded that the patient had a slight wing droop in his right wing and shoulder swelling. Though the initial trauma was not witnessed, injuries like this are often caused by window strikes. Our veterinarian wrapped the bird's wing to hold it in place and he was put in a small enclosure to limit his wing movement and encourage restful healing. This type of injury and care protocol is typical for birds in our care. CWC can provide injured birds a safe place to recuperate and access food. In the wild, without the ability to fly, the Indigo Bunting would have most likely been unable to find food and would have been a prime target for predators. CWC gives birds like the Indigo Bunting a second chance in the wild. While rehabilitating, staff noted that the patient was very active, alert, and eager to sing his song.

Indigo Buntings are migratory birds. They fly long distances at night and use the stars to guide their path! A study conducted in 1960 examined a group of Indigo Buntings in a planetarium. Scientists rearranged the star patterns and examined the birds' flight response. They found that Indigo Buntings change their flight patterns in response to the movement of the stars. Indigo Buntings migrate between the United States and Canada during their breeding season and Central and South America in the colder months.

During the mating season, the female is responsible for the creation of her nest and incubation of the clutch, while the male generally establishes and protects the territory. The Indigo Bunting has a range of vocalizations and uses certain calls to defend territory, attract a mate, and call out to other buntings. Nests are built lower to the ground and are often concealed in vegetation. There are often 3-4 eggs in a clutch and hatchlings usually stay in the nest for about 2 weeks.

From their stunning blue feathers to their impressive star guided migratory journeys, these small birds are impressive. On May 28, the young bird was released in the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve where there had been several Indigo Bunting sightings. It is the hope that the patient has joined the wild flock and is thriving.