



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

June 28, 2024

Mule Deer Fawns

California Wildlife Center is the only rehabilitation facility in Los Angeles County authorized to care for orphaned Mule Deer fawns. Female Mule Deer have a gestation period of seven months and can carry one to three fawns at one time, though one to two is more typical. In the first weeks of life, fawns will often stay hidden and out of view while their mother ventures off to graze. Fawns are born with spots (that fade as they age) which help them blend in with their surroundings during the day when their mother is away.

If a member of the public reports an alone but alert and healthy-looking fawn, chances are their mother is waiting for the human to leave the area so she can tend to her young. However, in instances where the deer is truly orphaned or has been taken from their mother, CWC can raise them to adulthood.

Currently, we have three fawns in our care (two males and one female), each arriving under different circumstances, but all were too young to be without their mother. One of the male fawns was admitted with a serious laceration on their right femur, after he was rescued from a water canal off Casitas Pass Road in Ventura. The other two fawns were found orphaned; the second male fawn was found next to his deceased mother, while the female was found with her umbilical cord still attached, indicating she was very young.

Deer are particularly prone to Capture Myopathy so medical and rehabilitative efforts must happen in a very specific way to avoid this potentially fatal condition from taking hold. Capture Myopathy is muscle damage resulting from physical exertion, struggle, or emotional stress that can lead to death. CWC makes every effort to limit the stimuli and stress around the deer both in their enclosures and when medical interventions are needed.

From intake to enclosure, we maintain a very calm and quiet environment for the fawns to avoid anxiety and stress. The deer enclosures have video cameras and one-way mirrors so that staff can monitor the fawns but interact minimally. When intervention is needed, our staff wear camouflaged hooded ponchos and move about the area silently and slowly. The camouflage outfits serve a dual purpose as they also help to reduce the risk of habituation. A deer who associates humans to food can later be a risk once released. When dealing with the wounded fawn, staff have needed to be strategic when examining and dressing the wound. Wildlife Technicians used food to keep the fawn calm and distracted while dressing and examining the laceration.



Wildlife Technician feeds a fawn in care wearing camouflaged poncho.



Fawn in care at CWC.



Mule Deer Fawn patient with laceration.



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Mule Deer Fawn in outdoor enclosure.

Mule Deer are born from April to June and are nursed by their mothers through the summer and weaned by the fall. Therefore, CWC cares for fawns until the fall when they are released as a group. Deer are very social creatures and travel together for protection. Fawn patients are kept in enclosures together to support this social nature. Deer are one of the only species that are soft released at the CWC property, this is to both reduce any unnecessary trauma associated with travel and encourage their joining of the local Mule Deer herd that occupies this area of the Santa Monica Mountains. While in care, fawns occupy straw lined mews in the evening and have access to a large outdoor enclosure throughout the day where they have room to socialize and move about.



Mule Deer Fawns receive branching enrichment.

Our Wildlife Technicians are pleased with the progress the injured fawn has made and report he is healing well! Two of the fawns have weaned off their formula bottles and all are eating a specialized dry diet along with leafy greens and fresh flowers. Our hospital staff report that all the fawns are exhibiting healthy development.