



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

July 19, 2024

Establishing the Pack



Coyote pups in care at CWC.

Coyotes often get a lot of grief for their habitation in cities and neighborhoods. However, they are an important part of the ecosystem and have been inhabitants of the Los Angeles area for tens of thousands of years. Coyotes are extremely adaptable and while humans have overrun much of their land, they have managed to live successfully in urban environments.

Every spring California Wildlife Center receives young Coyotes, for various reasons. Pups should never be seen alone in the wild. If you come across a single pup, help is likely needed. Since Coyotes could possibly carry the rabies virus, never attempt to contain, or touch them, instead contact Animal Control or the Department of Fish and Wildlife who will work with a local rehabilitation center to assess if help is needed. CWC works closely with both agencies and depends on these partnerships to help orphaned and injured wildlife who are best handled by professionals.

We currently have eight Coyote pups in care, all of whom were found orphaned except for one who was hit by a car and found on the road. The injured animal has received appropriate care and has since healed from his wound. When we receive young Coyotes, our protocol is to quarantine them for up to ten days to run diagnostics for contagious diseases like intestinal parasites and monitor for signs of distemper and rabies. During this time, they also receive vaccinations and are tested for parvo. If pups come in as a pair they are quarantined together, but if one is admitted alone, they will need to isolate alone to protect the overall health of the group.

This period of isolation, while imperative to biosecurity efforts, is difficult for a pack animal. To ease the stress that can come with isolation, CWC provides enrichment for the pup to keep them mentally engaged. CWC staff will make puzzles out of natural materials and store nutritious foods for the Coyotes to sniff and dig out. An additional activity is to provide the patient with a paper bag filled with straw and food; the foreign smells are stimulating and intriguing. After a short period of quarantine, pups are slowly integrated into a large enclosure together.

Coyotes are highly social animals and must be raised together. CWC works with agencies across the state to establish packs for single Coyotes that are found. The most recent pup in care was transported as a singleton from an agency near Morro Bay. Establishing a pack when they are young is not only essential to fulfill their social needs but also ensures they are bonded as a group before they are released, which will give them the best chance at survival once in the wild.



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Pup climbing in outdoor enclosure.

Integrating single or paired pups into a pack is a slow process, that requires careful monitoring. The process is done in stages to ensure a smooth integration, with the last step being a meeting between a pack member and the new pup. Generally, if the two can build rapport, the established pack member will be able to vouch for the new member. Another factor that makes this process tricky is that CWC staff try to limit their interactions with this species to avoid any chance of habituation. Therefore, much of the integration process is viewed via a live feed from a camera system that allows staff to carefully assess the temperament and interactions of the animals. The ability to view the interactions in this way also reduces the stress around the situation and allows the Coyotes to establish a connection.

CWC raises Coyote pups until they are old enough to survive in the wild and release them around October or November as a pack. We work with state and local officials to determine the best place for release, far away from human habitation. When determining a release location, it is important to find a place where there isn't already an established Coyote pack. Additionally, the release site must be near a water source.

Coyotes play an important role in population control and have roamed the Los Angeles area before many homes, businesses and roads were present. It is up to us to find solutions to coexist with this species as they have learned to do so with us.