



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

August 30, 2024

Western Pond Turtle Release

In March we reported on a Western Pond Turtle's entry into rehabilitative care. We are thrilled to announce that after five months in care, the patient was released back into the wild!

The male Western Pond Turtle was admitted after being hit by a car in Thousand Oaks, which resulted in extensive injuries to his carapace (shell). Injuries to a turtle's shell can take a long time to heal. Their shell is actually comprised of 50 fused bones, that includes the ribs, spine and parts of the pelvis. In this case, the entire lower carapace was severely cracked. When admitted two people were needed to treat the wound. A volunteer had to hold the turtle's shell in place while our Senior Wildlife Technician, Brittany Moser, meticulously flushed and cleaned debris from the wound. She then used butterfly bandages to hold the crack together. To help the shell heal, our team regularly changed the bandages and cleaned the wound to prevent infection, while also administering medications to manage the patient's pain. Once the turtle was stable enough, zip ties were used to hold the shell in place as a semi-permanent treatment solution.

The care plan was to keep the turtle dry docked so that the injury wouldn't get wet, but after a few successful weeks of healing our team introduced a shallow dish of water for the patient's lower half to soak in. After several weeks, staff introduced multiple hours of daily hydrotherapy, in which staff and volunteers would assist the turtle so that the bandages would stay dry. Western Pond Turtles eat underwater as they cannot swallow air. This period of hydrotherapy allowed staff to introduce the patient's diet to the water while also giving him the benefits of the therapy. Our Wildlife Technicians noticed that the turtle appeared to have a brighter mentation and more energy after each hydrotherapy session.



Original injury.



Multiple layers of bandages were placed to keep the area as dry as possible.



CWC volunteer assists with turtle hydrotherapy.



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Special zip ties were attached to the patient's shell to hold it together during the healing process.



The turtle is ready to be released.



Click on the picture to see a video of the release.

The Western Pond Turtle is a resilient and adaptable species and thrives in a variety of aquatic environments, like rivers and ponds. They are omnivorous, feeding on a diverse diet that includes aquatic plants, insects, and small fish. Despite their hardiness, this species faces significant threats like habitat loss, invasive species, and road mortality.

Western Pond Turtles are listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act. This species plays an important role in their ecosystem as both predator and prey. It is essential that we all work together to protect this species and their ecosystems so that they can fulfill their role in the food chain, which in turn supports the overall health of the water bodies that they inhabit.

After five months in care, and after receiving permission, a few staff members drove to the Botanical Gardens in Thousand Oaks to release the turtle into the stream. The patient went straight into the water and swam around exploring his new surroundings.

The best way that we can all work to protect this species is to both be mindful when driving and to work to keep streams safe, clean, and flowing to provide habitat for animals like this remarkable Western Pond Turtle.

If you see an animal hit by a car, please call us at 310/458-9453 so that we can advise on best next steps.