



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

August 9, 2024

Red-tailed Hawk

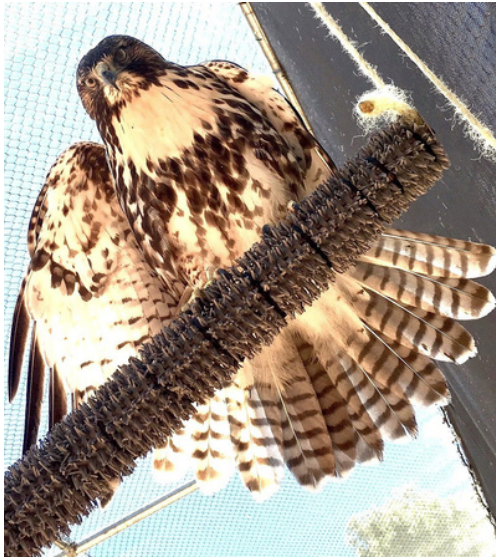
In July we were contacted by the Department of Fish and Wildlife about a Red-tailed Hawk. The hawk had been confiscated from someone who had been keeping the animal illegally. Red-tailed Hawks are protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. The Migratory Bird Treaty prohibits the killing, capturing, selling, trading and transport of birds and includes the moving or tampering with occupied nests.

The Red-tailed Hawk that was admitted came in with no obvious signs of trauma. However, after a flight test it was noted that the hawk became exhausted after flying a few lengths of the large aviary. Our hospital staff suspect that this was due to prolonged time in a small enclosure where the bird was unable to fly. The recommendation was to allow the patient sufficient time in the aviary to strengthen their flight muscles and stamina.

Red-tailed Hawks depend on their flying ability to be successful hunters in the wild. They can fly at speeds of up to 40 miles per hour and reach up to 120 miles per hour when hunting. Their eyesight is impressive, they can see their prey from up to 100 feet in the air! Hawks are carnivorous and they adhere to a diet that mostly consists of small mammals, though they have been known to feed on small birds and reptiles like snakes. Red-tailed Hawks prefer to soar in open spaces seeking prey and can be spotted overhead as you drive past fields, grasslands, and parks.

There are some easily identifiable Red-tailed Hawk characteristics to look out for. From the ground a birdwatcher might catch the bird's pale underside with brownish feathers speckled horizontally on the chest and you may observe a reddish tail. This type of hawk has brown feathers on their head and back. They are also "booted," which means that their feathers do not go all the way to their talons, some say it looks like they are wearing pants.

After seven days in care, it was determined that the hawk was ready for release. Luckily, this bird had a successful outcome, but unfortunately other animals are not as lucky. We regularly receive birds who have been kept as pets but have not received proper nutrition or veterinary care and cannot survive. If you find any native wild animal that you suspect may need help, you must contact the California Department of Fish and Wildlife within 24 hours. It is against the law to capture and keep wild birds, and violators can be penalized with a fine up to \$250,000 and/or imprisonment. If you suspect someone may be in unlawful possession of a protected species, please reach out the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.



Juvenile Red-tailed Hawk patient.



Red-tailed Hawk perching in outdoor aviary.