



WildTimes

Spring 2025

Dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and release of Southern California's sick, injured and orphaned wildlife

The Fox and the Fence: A Tale of Healing and Care

By Dr. Guthrum Purdin, Veterinarian

In December, we were contacted by an Agoura Hills animal control officer, letting us know their team was going out to rescue a Gray Fox sitting in daylight atop a high chain-link fence, refusing to jump down. This is highly abnormal for a fox. They can climb like cats and scaling a fence is not unusual, but allowing people to come up close, especially in daytime, is very much not normal. Was Fox hurt? Sick?

Reports said she was looking healthy, just wouldn't move. Preparing for Fox's care, I mentally listed all possible things that could be wrong. Having climbed over my grandmother's cyclone fence many times as a child, I knew they're often topped with sharp twists of wire. Was this what she was caught on? If so, how deep did the wounds go? How stressful it must have been for Fox to be stuck on top of the fence, night turning into day, being surrounded by what must have looked like scary "predators" (actually, helpful people) gathering below!



Gray Fox patient in care at CWC

The animal control officer was exceedingly careful using a loop-ended catchpole to secure the fox and lift her gently off the fence. On exam, Fox had, as I feared, two puncture holes on the underside of her neck. Being narrow wounds, it was hard to tell how deep they went. Was her trachea or esophagus punctured? She was breathing okay and there was little blood, so initial findings were hopeful. Our ICU staff got her stabilized and started medications.

Foxes, although small, are intelligent and stressed by captivity. The next day I did a thorough exam under sedation to make the process pain and stress free. Miraculously, the wounds did not affect any major internal structures. Fox could breathe and eat normally. I cleaned and disinfected the wounds, choosing to leave them open so they could drain, avoiding abscess formation. The patient was started on antibiotics, analgesics, anti-inflammatory, and anti-anxiety medications; Fox's future looked bright.

Then, the Palisades Fire started in early January! Our staff was onsite in the dead of night, the sky lit by an eerie red glow; the stench of smoke thick in the air. Staff quickly evacuated all our patients to safe locations. Neighboring animal care groups immediately stepped up to help take on our furry and feathered refugees. The healing fox was transferred to the Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network, who gladly took on the final phases of Fox's rehabilitation.

Thanks to the hard work and courage of fire fighters and emergency responders, the California Wildlife Center still stands. Last week, Fox was transferred back to us for release, her wounds completely resolved. There is a video of her racing off, and even in slow motion, she's almost too fast to focus on. So many people and organizations, directly and indirectly, came together to make it possible for her to return to her home in the wild! My thanks to them all!

Inside: The Northern Elephant Seal: "Orange",
Wildfires and Wildlife, Meet the Interns

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The Northern Elephant Seal: "Orange"

By Alexis Sierra RVTg, Stranding Coordinator

Northern Elephant Seals have a difficult start in life. Typically born late December through early February, Northern Elephant Seal pups nurse and remain with their mom for just over four weeks. The weaning is abrupt, after which they remain on the beach for a few more weeks surviving off their thick layer of baby fat. Then, they make their way out to the ocean, relying primarily on instinct. Spring is the busy season for rescuing weanling Northern Elephant Seal pups in Malibu. The seal pups haul out and strand on the beach for a number of reasons including starvation, illness, ingested toxins, parasites, predator trauma, and human interaction.

One of the special patients rescued this past season was case #24-046, nicknamed "Orange," for the color of the nontoxic grease marker applied as identification. This young male elephant seal pup was rescued from Westward Beach on March 24, 2024, due to severe dehydration, emaciation, and an injury to the right eye. During the initial exam, staff noted that the eye had a cloudy and bloodshot appearance. He was prescribed antibiotics and given a sterile saline flush twice a day to combat the infection. One month into care, the right eye infection was stagnant.

Two good eyes are ideal, however elephant seals are deep divers using their vibrissae, or whiskers, to aid in foraging for food, which enables them to compensate for vision deficits. Meaning, Orange was still on track for release despite a non-visual right eye. However, his challenges did not stop there. The rehab team noted that during his journey to learn to eat fish, he often left large amounts of fish, ate at a slower pace compared to other pups in care, and appeared to experience trouble swallowing. Concerned about discomfort caused by irritation or inflammation to the upper GI tract, anti-inflammatory medication was added to his treatment.

After a couple of weeks, Orange worked through his challenges swallowing whole fish, then quickly began to meet the milestones necessary for release. Now ready to work on underwater foraging, he eventually learned how to dive and compete with other pups, vital to an elephant seal pup's development. After 113 days of care, Orange's eye infection was fully healed, and his previous struggles with eating whole fish were overcome. He was successfully released back into the wild, weighing a healthy 157 lbs.



Orange during the intake process



Staff noted that Orange's eye had a cloudy and bloodshot appearance



The orange identification mark is clearly visible on the patient's head



Orange's release day

Entering March, the next generation of young Northern Elephant Seal pups are heading out on their own journey to survive. Some may need a little help along the way. It starts with you – noticing, caring, and reporting concerns to our rescue team (310) 924-7256. Thank you!

Wildfires and Wildlife

By Kristen Kanatzar, Hospital Manager

Living in Southern California, we are all accustomed to the year-round fire season and the impact it can have on our lives. When a fire is imminent, humans are often preoccupied with our own need for survival; we often forget about how natural disasters like wildfires impact the surrounding wildlife.

Wildlife is greatly impacted by wildfires due to a number of reasons. The immediate reason is the need to escape. When animals are trying to escape a fire, their likelihood of coming into contact with humans is significantly greater. The risk for window strikes and car collisions increases as animals descend from hillsides and wilderness into more populated urban areas. This movement can put already terrified animals into even more dangerous situations.



Franklin Fire burns near CWC

Animals who are either too young, already injured, or ill have a more challenging time getting away from a fire. This increases their risk of sustaining injuries. Because of an existing condition, animals may not be able to run or fly away from a fire, leading them to quickly find a hiding place. Sometimes these hiding places are safe and other times they are not. When a hiding place is unsafe, it can cause an animal to suffer from severe burns on their feet, legs, wings, and bodies. Unfortunately, most animals do not survive when they experience injuries like this.

For those who are able to escape a fire, there are still lasting impacts. Many animals suffer from smoke inhalation as they escape, either running through or flying over the burn areas. Some birds also experience singed wings as they fly over the extreme heat rising from the fire. These types of injuries to both the animal's body and respiratory tract can impact their health for months following the fire. Even wildlife who are lucky enough to escape without any serious injuries feel the effects of wildfires. The

amount of habitat lost due to fires can be remarkable. Animals can become displaced and must relocate to a new territory. This relocation puts a strain on already limited resources and increases instances of human-wildlife interactions.

The effects of wildfires can be felt in our natural environments as well as our communities for years to come. The impacts are massive and the only remedy to heal the communities lost and the habitats destroyed is time.



LA County wildfire



Burn scar from fire in the Santa Monica Mountains

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Meet our First Interns of the Season!

By Jasmine Regalado, Volunteer Coordinator

California Wildlife Center's ability to help 4,000 patients annually is largely due to the stellar team of volunteers and interns that donate their time and hard work to assist our animal care staff. Every year, CWC hosts 25 interns who are admitted into one of three internship tracks - Marine Mammal Rescue and Rehabilitation, Wildlife Rehabilitation, and Wildlife Hotline and Outreach. Interns donate 300 hours of their time over the course of 10 weeks. They learn department specific skills such as assisting with rescues of marine species, feeding and administering medication, restraining patients for staff during exams and wound care, corresponding with and educating members of the public, and so much more. Please welcome our first two interns of the season!



Skylar Westbrook

Skylar has spent the last six and a half years working in a small animal hospital and will be applying to vet school this fall. Passionate about animal care, she's excited to get some hands-on experience with California's diverse wildlife and learn about what rehabilitation looks like from rescue to release.



Fannie Luu

Fannie has a strong interest in wildlife rehabilitation. She is a Wildlife Hotline and Outreach intern. Fannie is in her final semester of an Anthropology M.S. program. After graduation, she hopes to work with wildlife or at a shelter.