



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

February 7, 2025

The Nifty Nestling



Young band-tailed patient in makeshift nest.

In January we received a nestling Band-tailed Pigeon from La Canada. Upon examination staff noticed swelling in their right hock (similar to an ankle) and a small abrasion on their femur. The patient was given anti-inflammatory medication and provided heat support via an incubator.

Band-tailed Pigeons are members of the Columbidae family and a relative of the Rock Pigeon (a species commonly spotted in populated areas and city streets). Band-tailed Pigeons are more often found in forests and perched up high in trees; their nests can be hundreds of feet from the ground. They tend to roost and gather in large flocks, sometimes consisting of up to 300 pigeons at one time. Additionally, their diets are almost exclusively vegetarian- consisting of nuts, notably acorns, grains, and berries.



Staff add elements similar to those found in the wild.

This species has a long nesting season and can make multiple nests a year, generally incubating one or two eggs at a time. Both the male and female work to make the nest. Once their hatchlings emerge from the egg the parents will feed them "crop milk," which is a fatty substance high in protein that is excreted from the crop of adult pigeons with young offspring.

Since our young patient is not yet old enough to eat on their own, our staff have been tube feeding them multiple times a day to ensure they receive the nutrients necessary for proper development. When the nestling first arrived, they were fed four times a day, but now they've gained enough weight that they only require feeding three times a day. The allotted formula amount and frequency of feeding is dependent on a patient's weight.

Most recently, the nestling was moved out of the incubator and into an enclosure in our ICU, which is a sign that they are developing appropriately and growing feathers that allow them to thermoregulate on their own. Their injuries on the right leg are healing well, and staff report that the young patient is energetic and excitedly flutters their wings when it's mealtime. Additionally, our Wildlife Technicians have placed a mirror in the enclosure, which the pigeon seems to enjoy. This is done to help the patient feel as though they are with others of their kind, which is important for social species like the Band-tailed Pigeon.

Once the pigeon is about double their current weight and is self-feeding, they will be moved to an outdoor closure for aviary time prior to release. This nestling's prognosis is positive, and we are hopeful their growth continues so they can join the wild once again!