



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

March, 14 2025

California Wildlife Center's NICU is Open!

We are excited to announce that our Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) is now open! Our NICU is an important part of CWC's operation and is open from March through October. Most young animals are born in the spring and summer months and require specialized care. This is why it is so important that we have a department dedicated to them.

Many of our young patients come in after they have been found orphaned, injured or both. We take in a high volume of opossums, squirrels, corvids, doves, pigeons, hummingbirds, and songbirds during this time.

The NICU has a demanding feeding and husbandry schedule and requires a specific set of skills and expertise. To ensure these patients get optimal care, staff lead a trained group of dedicated volunteers to perform the specialized tasks that this department demands. All young patients are fed multiple times a day and require specific diets, formulas and enclosures. Our team works tirelessly to create an environment for our patients that carefully mimics the care they would receive from their parents in the wild.

We currently have 6 Mourning Doves, 2 hummingbirds, 11 Virginia Opossums and 16 Squirrels in our NICU. One of the Mourning Doves sustained severe trauma to the skin on their head, potentially from blunt force trauma or a predator attack. Our veterinarian was able to give the young dove stitches, and they seem to be accepting food well, gaining weight and steadily improving.



Mourning Dove patient received stitches.



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It can be extremely difficult to tell if a young animal is in need of help, or if they are healthy and should stay in the wild. The most common situations we are contacted about during the spring and summer months are concerns about young birds hopping on the ground who are not able to fly. Most species of birds go through a developmental stage called a fledgling period. A fledgling is a bird who is too old to be in the nest but has not yet mastered the skill of flight. The fledgling stage is a dangerous time for developing birds, since they are very susceptible to predator attacks. If you are ever concerned about a wild animal, it is best to contact your local wildlife rehabilitator for advice.

For more information on what to do when finding a baby animal, refer to our blog article, ["Are You My Mother? When to Intervene."](#)



From left to right: Two Virginia Opossums enjoying their breakfast; Orphaned newborn squirrel admitted to NICU; Anna's Hummingbird learns to self-feed.