



WildTimes

Summer 2025

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

Rehabilitating Adult California Sea Lions affected by Domoic Acid Toxicity

By Heather Henderson, Marine Mammal Program Manager

The California Wildlife Center's marine mammal rehabilitation program turned 13 this year. During the 2013 "Unusual Mortality Event" affecting California Sea Lion pups (less than 1 year of age) we transitioned from a rescue and transport program to one that includes on-site rehabilitation of young Northern Elephant Seals and California Sea Lions. Each winter, spring, and early summer, the majority of rescued marine mammals in Malibu are early weaned or severely malnourished seals and sea lions.

Our team typically rescues fewer than twenty adult California Sea Lions each year. Most commonly, we see sea lions with predator wounds during the summer, and a few Leptospirosis cases popping up in the fall. This year alone, our team has performed 225 responses.



A sturdy cover was built to turn our pool enclosure into a safe space for adult California Sea Lions

2025 has presented new challenges for our local pinnipeds, and the humans that care for them. On February 19, 2025, an adult sea lion was found stranded on a beach in Malibu, displaying signs of Domoic Acid (DA) Toxicity. Within the next week, reports of seizing sea lions flooded the rescue phone. By the beginning of March, affected marine mammals were showing up along the entire Southern California coastline. Reflecting on data from the past 10 years, this is the earliest and most severe event involving adult California Sea Lions affected by Domoic Acid Toxicity.

Adults historically were transported directly to our network partner for rehabilitative care. After rescuing two dozen adult California Sea Lions and transferring them to Marine Mammal Care Center LA (MMCCCLA), it became clear they were also seeing a surge in intakes, and rehabilitation space was quickly running out. We had a choice, leave all ailing sea lions on the beach or immediately augment our enclosures to perform full-term rehabilitative care for DA affected sea lions. The timing was tough, as it aligned with the height of the Northern Elephant Seal pup stranding-season, but regardless of this fact, we chose the latter.



Stranding Coordinator, Alexis Sierra RVTg, provides fluid therapy for sea lions in care

Within days, a sturdy cover was built to turn our pool enclosure into a safe space to house and care for adult California Sea Lions. Since adapting our space, three dozen adult female sea lions, severely affected by Domoic Acid Toxicity, have been brought into care and given a second chance at survival in an increasingly difficult wild world. Each adult remains in care for 3-4 weeks.

During week one, managing seizure activity and providing fluid therapy is top priority. This calms the body and helps flush out the toxins. During week two, additional nourishment and medication is administered with the goal of resuming self-feeding. Week three (and four when needed) are used to monitor overall health and behavior to determine if the individual is ready to return to their natural environment.

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The last big event was in 2023. That year, CWC responded to 254 ailing marine mammals in Malibu. To date, we have responded to 267 animals. Each year presents new challenges, and we constantly work to rise to those challenges to assist the beautiful animals that we are fortunate to call our wild neighbors! How can you help? In Malibu, report marine mammals in distress by calling our rescue line at 310-924-7256. Never attempt to push an animal back into the water, feed or pour water on them. Keep dogs on a leash and do not let them approach.

The Littlest Dove

By Kristen Kanatzar, Hospital Manager

Every Spring brings hundreds of young animals to our center in need of care. They come to us for a variety of reasons including losing their mother, being injured, or being ill. One of the first species we see in the Spring is the Mourning Dove. These quiet little birds are a common visitor to many urban backyards and are known for their tell-tale cooing that is reminiscent of a sorrowful call.

One of our first doves of the season came to us on March 1st, with thankfully, no injuries and weighing only 13g- roughly the same weight as a AA battery. When doves arrive this little it is extremely critical to get them proper nutrition, which includes formula that closely mirrors the mother's crop milk. To achieve this, we tube feed them a formula-based diet that is both protein and carbohydrate rich. Doves generally eat only seeds as adults, but when they first hatch, they require a very high level of protein to kick-start their growth and feather development.



Nestling dove during intake



Dove in nest



Patient with flock mate



Dove as a juvenile before release

After a short time, the little dove had grown enough to transition to the next stage of food, a primarily grain-based formula. Although the young dove was still being tube fed, we also started offering seeds. During this time, more young doves were admitted to our NICU, which helped our littlest one begin to understand how to interact and socialize properly with their own species.

After about a month in care, the little dove had developed enough to graduate to the final stage at our center — moving outside! At this point, we had created a group of six young doves over the course of their time inside. Once they all reached 74g, the specific weight where they no longer need human intervention and are able to eat seed completely independently, they were moved to an outside enclosure. Our aviaries are large and allow for the birds to build up their flight muscles, become acclimated to the weather, develop proper circadian rhythms, and reduce exposure to people, all of which are required for a successful release. After some time, our technicians assessed the group for release. We reviewed the original locations of the six doves and selected a local park close to where they were originally found.

On April 23th, our littlest dove was successfully released with the other five of their flock mates, which goes to show that even the smallest creatures can thrive and survive.

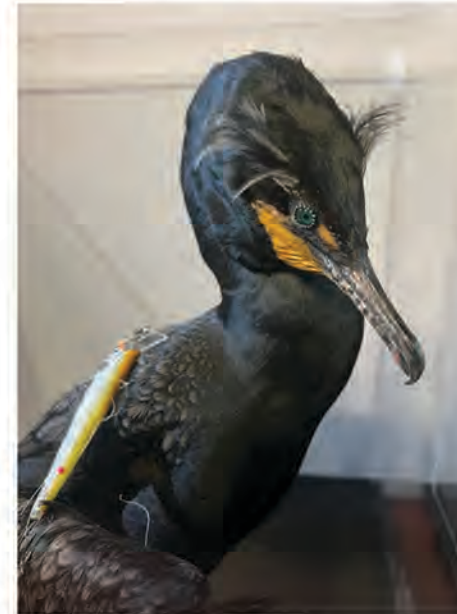


Patient released back into the wild

Taxidermy Exhibits

By Cambria Wells, Outreach & Education Manager

The reality of working at a wildlife hospital is, despite our best efforts, some animals don't recover. In these cases, they may be held or necropsied to assist with law enforcement investigations, determine their cause of death, or be preserved for research. This year there is a new possibility – education. With the help of our colleagues at Prey Taxidermy, we can preserve some of our patients and have them returned to us as near-to-life examples of the beauty and vulnerability of the species we serve.



This Double-crested Cormorant display exhibits the impact human activities can have on wildlife

Selecting an animal to preserve is both personal and technical. When selecting animals for our exhibits, we are committed to educating our community by thoughtfully sharing the animals' stories. We must work with the species regularly to share our experiences with their needs, their personalities, their struggles in Southern California and their unique charms. Finally, we must work with professionals who we can trust to treat them with respect, and who understand the anatomy of the animal well enough to represent them with accuracy.

One goal of our exhibits is to provide a better understanding of our wild neighbors while also starting conversations about coexistence and human impact. Our handsome Double-crested Cormorant is often unknown to people who approach our booth, despite being so commonly close to the shore and on piers in Los Angeles. The hook and line wrapped around his wing tells the story of how we receive so many animals impacted by items humans have left in the environment. Our Peregrine Falcon's juvenile feathers quietly introduce the vast numbers of animals under two years old that we receive at our facility every year. Each animal has their story as an individual, and as a member of a group or species that we have the power to improve outcomes for every day.

Taxidermy is a complex blend of science and art. At CWC, we know that having our patients preserved in this way brings back a portrait of who they have been, and that our exhibits can help them begin to tell their own stories. If you see the CWC van at an event, come say hi; we have a few friends we'd love to introduce you to.

A Tail of Survival

By Cori Carlson, Administrative Coordinator

Bobcats, named for their short or "bobbed" tails, are about twice the size of an average domestic cat. These wild cats have white spots and short black tufts of hair on the top of their ears. Their brownish coats with black spots help them camouflage in thick brush and rocky areas. Bobcats are solitary animals who are mostly active at dusk and dawn, but they are sometimes seen during the day hunting small mammals, lizards, and snakes. Like the domestic cat, the wild felines use their whiskers to help them navigate their surroundings – like people use fingers.

California Wildlife Center recently treated an almost 8-pound bobcat who was rescued from a burn area in Sierra Madre after the Eaton Fire. On January 29, the bobcat was admitted to Pasadena Humane emaciated, with burns on her paws and singed fur on her backside. During a more extensive exam the following day, the medical team placed the cat under sedation and found exposed bone on her paws.

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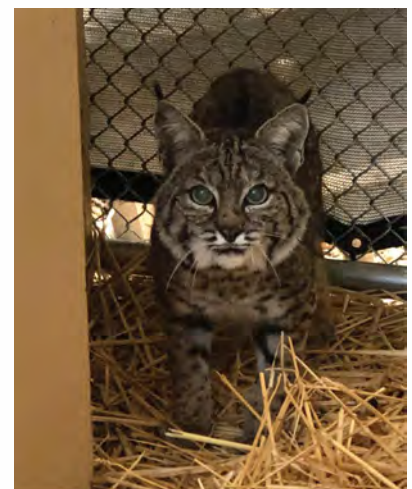
A Tail of Survival - continued

They soaked her paws in warm water and scrubbed them with an antiseptic to prevent any infection. Once her paws were dried and medicated, multiple layers of bandages with medical-grade honey were applied to help with healing. For the next month, the hospital staff debrided, cleaned, medicated and wrapped the cat's paws while closely monitoring her progress.

On March 23, the bobcat was transferred to California Wildlife Center, where she would have an outdoor enclosure of her own for the final stage of her rehabilitation. She spent weeks reacclimating to her natural environment and building up strength. By late April, she was running, jumping, and climbing without any signs of physical limitation. Three months after her rescue, the resilient bobcat was released back into the wild near where she was found.



Female bobcat in care at CWC



Bobcat prior to release