



# California Wildlife Center

## Patient of the Week

**August 22, 2025**

### **A Cooper's Hawk's Resilience**



Cooper's Hawk monitored remotely to reduce stress.

In wildlife rehabilitation there are always cases that surprise and surpass the care teams' initial expectations. Such was the case of an adult male Cooper's Hawk that came to CWC in July, after suffering head trauma.

Upon admission, the patient presented with ataxia and a right-sided head tilt (findings commonly seen in window strike or car impact injuries). Ataxic refers to difficulty coordinating movements, which usually indicates a neurological issue. While a head tilt was observed, it was difficult to discern whether it was due to injury or a response to the hawk's heightened stress during handling for exams and treatment. The patient had made significant progress in other areas and was eventually moved from the ICU to a small aviary.

The Cooper's Hawk continued to do well in all other aspects of care, and the ataxia gradually resolved. The head tilt, however, persisted, raising concern that despite supportive care and anti-inflammatories the condition might be permanent and impact the hawk's ability to return to the wild. The care team chose to give the hawk more time and transferred him to the larger flight aviary. Remarkably, within minutes of entering the aviary, the head tilt corrected itself.

It took the patient a few hours to adjust to the new enclosure, but he has since been observed flying normally and without difficulty.

Before the patient can be cleared for release, he must undergo an assessment to evaluate his ability to maneuver around obstacles. This test is especially critical for species like the Cooper's Hawk, which rely on speed, agility, and the element of surprise when hunting. They pursue both ground-dwelling prey and other birds at higher elevations, often through dense brush or cluttered environments. To ensure hawk patients are fully prepared for release, staff create an 'obstacle course' that tests their ability to navigate complex terrain with precision.

We remain optimistic that this resilient patient, who has already shown a strong will to survive, will soon be ready for release back into the wild.