



WildTimes

Fall 2025

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

A New Chapter at CWC

By Jenn Guess, Executive Director

It is with deep gratitude and great excitement that I introduce myself as the new Executive Director of California Wildlife Center. Stepping into this role is both a profound honor and a heartfelt responsibility - one I do not take lightly.

Back in 2012, I was working as a financial analyst, searching for a way to make a meaningful difference for wild animals in Southern California. I had always felt a deep passion for wildlife, so I was thrilled to be accepted as an ICU volunteer at California Wildlife Center. Just a few weeks into my volunteering, I was asked to deliver diets to the Baby Care Unit (now known as the NICU). A staff member invited me to stay and help offer formula to a group of young hummingbirds. I still vividly remember the moment a fledgling flew over and gently landed on my hand, trying to reach the syringe of food. Words can't fully capture the awe I felt, but in that moment, I knew I was going to be a "lifer" at CWC.

California Wildlife Center is an incredibly special place. I would have been content spending my time cleaning crates, doing laundry, preparing diets, and assisting the staff with animal care for decades to come. To my surprise, in the spring of 2013, I was offered a position as an Animal Care Coordinator. I jumped at the opportunity to pivot my career and dedicate myself full-time to something so meaningful. There was a steep learning curve, but I was ready for the challenge.

Over the years, I've had the privilege of holding many roles: Animal Care Coordinator, Wildlife Technician, Senior Wildlife Technician, Senior Wildlife Technician Supervisor, Development Manager, Hospital Manager, and now Executive Director. While my job titles have changed, one thing has remained constant, my unwavering commitment to providing the best care possible to every patient who comes through our doors.
(continued on page 2)



Jenn Examining a Brown Pelican in 2014



Jenn washing a Barn Owl in 2019



Jenn at an outreach event in 2022



Jenn assisting the Marine Mammal team in 2025

Inside: The Story of Orange, Affects of Light Pollution on Wildlife, A Night for Wildlife

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(continued from page 1)

Each year, California Wildlife Center admits about 4,000 wild patients, and it takes a dedicated community to provide care for each one. I am incredibly proud of our compassionate and skilled staff who work tirelessly from sunrise to sunset, and often beyond. I am deeply thankful for our volunteers, who give so much of their time, energy, and heart to help us give our patients a second chance. And I am profoundly grateful to our donors, whose generosity keeps our doors open 365 days a year.

Together, we are part of something bigger than ourselves. Together, we give the gift of a second chance to wild animals in need of help.

I am honored to serve as your Executive Director and excited for what lies ahead. Thank you for being part of this journey and thank you for believing in the work we do.

The Story of Orange

By Alexis Sierra, RVTg, Stranding Coordinator

Each year, during the months of March-May, our Marine Mammal Rescue team at CWC receives a high volume of calls regarding stranded Northern Elephant Seal pups on the beaches in Malibu. Northern Elephant Seal pups are born in late December through early February and have an abrupt weaning period of just over four weeks. They will then make their journey into the ocean for the first time, primarily relying on instinct. Seal pups may begin to have difficulty in the ocean for a variety of reasons, including starvation, trauma, parasites, or human interaction, and may begin to haul out and end up in rehabilitative care. Each pup that comes in for rehabilitation receives a second chance at life, which was the case for patient #25-097.

On March 12, our team responded to a report of a stranded Northern Elephant Seal pup on El Sol Beach in Malibu. This patient was nicknamed “Orange,” for the non-toxic grease marker applied as identification. During her intake examination, staff observed that this patient was severely emaciated, dehydrated, and had a cloudy right eye that appeared to have a sunken appearance. After weaning from their mothers, pups typically weigh around 300lbs. Meaning that Orange, who only weighed 59lbs, had lost a significant amount of weight, falling just below birth weight (60-80lbs). Elephant seal pups that come into care at her weight range are considered extremely critical patients, as they do not have the proper layer of blubber to maintain their nutrition, insulation, or buoyancy to survive in the wild. Orange was promptly started on nutritional supplements to assist in weight gain, subcutaneous fluids to aid in hydrational therapy, as well as pain medication and antibiotics to combat any infection that may have been caused by her damaged eye.



Orange in care at CWC



Dr. Goldenberg and team examine Orange's eye.



Orange spends time in pool

While in care, the rehab team observed that Orange quickly learned to self-feed, although her subsequent progress was slow. She appeared to have difficulty swallowing and often left large amounts of fish in the pool. Once she was moved into our larger pool and learned how to compete with other seals, she happily adapted, overcame her challenges, and met important milestones to prepare her for life in the wild.

Northern Elephant Seal pups are still considered releasable with one visual eye. Due to their deep diving nature, Elephant Seals primarily rely on other senses, such as their vibrissae (whiskers), to aid in foraging for food. The non-visual eye did not cause discomfort and remained stagnant while in care. Our Director of Animal Care, Dr. Lauren Michaels, brought in Dr. Goldenberg and her dedicated staff at Veterinary Eye Clinic to examine Orange's eye utilizing specialized equipment. With the support of the veterinary specialists and rehabilitation team, Orange was cleared for release in early August, breaking the record for longest patient we've had in care.

On August 6th, after 147 days and gaining about two and a half times her intake weight, Orange was released off a boat near Santa Rosa Island through our partnership with Island Packers. Special thank you to our staff, volunteers, and partners for making this moment possible. It all starts with you - report concerns on the beaches in Malibu to our Marine Mammal Rescue Team at 310-924-7256.

Affects of Light Pollution on Wildlife

By Dr. Guthrum Purdin, DVM

Our ancient ancestors were day-active people: hunting, gathering, and farming under the light of the sun. When night came on, they'd draw together, lighting fires against the dark. Today, we have the technology to illuminate the night with brilliant electric lights. While modern day lighting is helpful, it can become extremely dangerous 'light pollution' for the night-active animals that share the world around us.

For example, sea turtle hatchlings emerge from their nests under sandy beaches at night. They travel this way so they can get to the ocean's protection without being spotted by gulls and other predators. But for a newborn turtle, it's a big, complicated world—how can they know which way to go in the dark? As soon as they're out of the nest, they look for the reflected light of the moon and stars on the waves, then head out as fast as they can. Humans inadvertently cause serious trouble for the hatchlings through the brighter lights of buildings and roads. Infant turtles see the brilliant shine of electric lights then head inland, away from safety. When the sun rises, they are disoriented, dehydrated, and easy prey for predators. This is especially devastating for Green Sea Turtles in Hawaii, a species already endangered by human-caused environmental changes. Similarly, when leaving their natal nests for the very first time, fledglings of several Hawaiian birds such as Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Hawaiian Petrels, and Newell's Shearwaters also use the celestial lights to guide their first flights toward the sea. City lights confuse them, leading many in the wrong direction, away from safety and food and causing them to land disoriented on sports fields and roads.

Many birds migrate at night, relying on the stars to guide them. Years ago, while traveling with friends in Las Vegas, we passed a newly opened casino with a gigantic spotlight rising like a tower into the sky. We could see hundreds of birds circling inside the beam of light like a feathered tornado, confused and disoriented, flying around and around until they collapsed from exhaustion. Lights like the one we saw in Vegas can confuse and mesmerize night fliers, trapping them in the cones of brilliance on spiraling flights. Many die from exhaustion, others, blinded by the light, crash into buildings.

Fortunately, the ingenuity that allows people to build roads and cities blazing with light also helps to find solutions. One option is using red or amber lights with longer wavelengths that are less disruptive for wildlife. Another option is full cutoff fixtures that direct light downward only, so it doesn't attract birds at night. At the 9/11 Memorial in New York, whenever concerning numbers of birds begin to circle the light, it is turned off for 20 minutes, allowing them to disperse and continue on their migration. Other simpler solutions include dimming and reducing the overall brilliance of artificial lights, drawing curtains closed at night when lights are on, or simply turning off unnecessary lights. Organizations like the Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP) in Toronto focus on rehabilitating injured birds, conducting scientific research, promoting wildlife-friendly regulations, and engaging in public outreach to develop more effective responses. Together we can all make a difference.

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A promotional poster for the "A Night for Wildlife" event. It features a large, full moon in the upper left corner and a close-up of a white owl with dark eyes on the right. The title "A Night for Wildlife" is written in a large, elegant, yellow script font. Below the title, the text "An Evening of Hope, Healing, Education, and Wild Beauty" is written in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font. Further down, the location "The Event Center, Agoura Hills" and the date and time "September 18th 6pm-9pm" are listed in a bold, sans-serif font. A QR code is located in the bottom right corner, with a speech bubble next to it that says "Scan the QR code to learn more and buy your tickets today!". The website "cawildlife.org" is printed in the bottom left corner.

*A Night
for Wildlife*

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Education, and Wild Beauty**

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