



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

WildTimes

Winter 2025

Rising Again: Successful Wing Fracture Repair and Flight Recovery

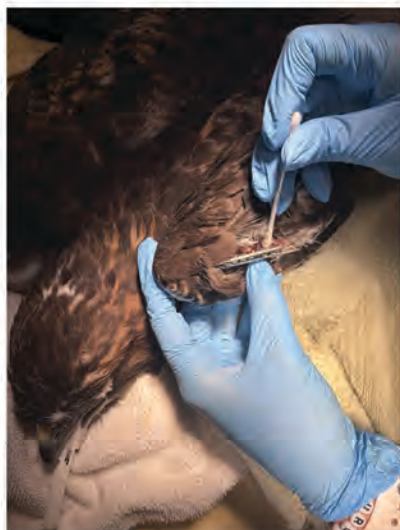
By Dr. Lauren Michaels, Director of Animal Care

One of California Wildlife Center's most common patients are raptors suffering from blunt force trauma- often resulting from vehicle collisions, window strikes, or other unknown trauma. On August 22, 2025, an adult female Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) was brought to the center by a good Samaritan after being found grounded and unable to fly in Los Angeles.

On admit, she exhibited a drooping left wing and dehydration. CWC's animal care team stabilized her with subcutaneous fluids, anti-inflammatories and a wing wrap to reduce pain and movement. After rest and stabilization, her wing droop persisted, prompting the next steps- diagnostic imaging. Given that our patients do not "sit still" for their own care, she was placed under general anesthesia for full body radiographs (x-rays). We discovered a fracture of the left major and minor metacarpal bones- structures essential for flight feather attachment wing stability. Given the significance of these bones, we elected to pursue orthopedic surgery for structural support and long-term healing.

Avian bone anatomy presents unique surgical challenges, as their pneumatic (air-filled) structure makes them both lightweight and delicate. A method called external fixation was used to stabilize the broken bone. Pins were placed into the bone on either side of the fracture and connected with a lightweight bar outside the body to hold everything in place while it healed.

(continued on page 2)



Dr. Michaels employs external fixation to stabilize the broken bone.



Dr. Michaels does physical therapy on the patient's wing.



6-week post-operative radiographs of Red-tailed Hawk's wing.

Inside: Highlights from a Wild 2025 Marine Stranding Season, Wildlife Rescue Calls, Giving Tuesday



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(continued from page 1)

Healing takes time and patience- both for the patient and the rehabilitator. Wing fractures in large birds require roughly between four to eight weeks to heal, during which strict cage rest, physical therapy, and careful pin-site maintenance are critical. To minimize stress while maintaining mobility in the wing, this hawk received weekly physical therapy to prevent joint stiffness.

Three weeks post-surgery, follow-up radiographs showed stable alignment and early callus formation (bone regrowth), though healing was incomplete. After nearly six weeks of recovery, a final set of radiographs confirmed full fracture stabilization, and the pins were safely removed under anesthesia.

The hawk was then transferred to a small outdoor enclosure for pre-flight conditioning, and she was able to fully extend her wing freely for the first time in weeks! These intermediate enclosures are vital, offering both reduced stress and a controlled environment to rebuild muscle and bone strength after prolonged rest.

Her journey embodies the resilience of wildlife and the dedication of those who care for them. Soon, she will advance to a large flight aviary for full flight conditioning. Thanks to the skill, compassion, and resources at California Wildlife Center, this remarkable hawk's story shows that even the most wounded can rise again.

Highlights from a Wild 2025 Marine Stranding Season

By Heather Henderson, Marine Program Manager

2025 will go down in the record books as a year of many challenges. Yet, with challenges come growth and shining moments of success! Things started off slower than in 2024, but that quickly changed. By the second week of January, devastating wildfires forced us to evacuate. Response operations shifted to a remote staging location.

In mid-February, just 3-weeks later, the region was hit by the longest (13 weeks) and most severe harmful algal bloom (HAB) recorded in Southern California. This event exposed thousands of California Sea Lions and Common Dolphins to two concurrent neurotoxins (domoic acid and saxitoxin) wreaking havoc on the health of our native marine mammals. Here is a look at some of the notable moments.

Over 3,500 calls were fielded by our marine mammal team, resulting in 500 responses. These included 359 investigations involving eight different marine mammal species and 141 responses related to thirteen species of marine birds. To make this possible, more than 11,700 hours were dedicated to the efforts, including over 5,000 staff hours and 6,700 volunteer hours.

We are proud to report that this season, 95% of all Northern Elephant Seal patients were released, and 72% of all rescued pinnipeds were released. Additionally, we were able to collect important morphometric and health data from the postmortem exams of 105 patients.



Northern Elephant Seal (#25-91)



Northern Elephant Seals in care.



California Sea Lion patient release day!

Our strict safety protocols resulted in zero injury related animal bites to our team. Exhausted yet thankful for the decrease in strandings, we used the fall months to recover and reflect. We carefully evaluated the challenges we faced, turning them into actionable updates to our protocols.

Successfully rehabilitated patients like #25-91 and #25-242 are celebrated! Northern Elephant Seal pup #25-91 was rescued from the rocks minutes before the tide would wash her away. She weighed only 61 lbs., less than at birth. After learning to forage and in good body condition, #25-91 returned to her ocean home, a robust 167 lbs.

California Sea Lion #25-242 stranded at the height of the HAB crisis. Our team monitored and stabilized her on the beach for 5 days before a safe extraction could be performed. In care, her seizures persisted, leading us to fear that her brain damage was too severe to address. Never giving up, we employed a new treatment approach which pulled her through. Watching #25-242 race towards the ocean, healthy against the odds, highlights the power of care in action!

Wildlife Rescue Calls

By Cori Carlson, Administrative Coordinator

If you give a squirrel a cookie... Each day we receive a variety of calls and we never know where they might lead. While many make us smile or laugh, some are emotional. These calls remind us that behind every rescue is a person who stopped what they were doing to help an animal in need. That gives us hope.

We thought it might be fun to share a couple of the more common calls we receive: the stories behind the rescues that come through our doors.

Recently a call came in from a concerned woman who had found a young squirrel alone in her yard. She was doing all the right things – observing, asking questions, and getting ready to bring the little one in for care. But, before we ended the call, she added, “Oh, and I gave him some milk and cookies because he

seemed hungry.” Cue the internal gasp... Before I hung up, I politely shared what squirrels eat (hint: it's not Oreos and milk).



California Ground Squirrel in NICU.

Every year, we get dozens of similar calls where someone finds a baby animal and, with the best intentions, offers them a snack from their pantry.

Probably our most common call is, “I rescued a baby bird I found on the ground.” We get it, it's totally natural to worry about young animals who appear to be alone. But here's a little secret, most of the time, they are fine. Most young birds leave their nest before they can fully fly. These scruffy little adventurers, called fledglings, spend a few days hopping and fluttering around on the ground while they learn to fly. It's completely normal, and their parents are usually close by watching over them, even if we don't see them. Like teenagers, fledglings just need a little space and patience while they're learning.



California Scrub-Jay fledgling.

These are just two of the more than 30,000 calls and text messages we receive each year. Whether someone spots a coyote running through their neighborhood “off leash,” finds ducklings swimming in their pool, sees a bird hit a window, or discovers an animal stuck to a glue trap, we're here to answer questions and, hopefully, help give these animals a second chance in the wild.

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