



# California Wildlife Center

## Patient of the Week

**October 17, 2025**

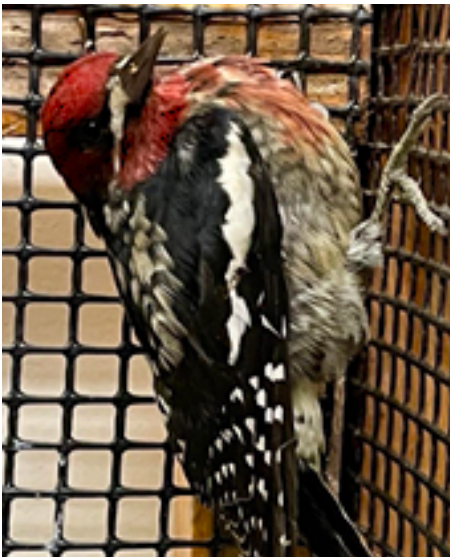
### The Salient Sapsucker

The Red-breasted Sapsucker is striking, both in name and appearance. This woodpecker species has a brilliant red head and chest, with a black-and-white speckled body. Like other woodpeckers, the sapsucker uses their beak as a powerful tool, drilling into tree trunks to access insects and sap. The sap attracts hungry insects, and the sapsucker later returns to enjoy a buffet of bugs and sweet tree sap. To help with sap collection, this bird uses their uniquely barbed tongue.



Red-breasted Sapsucker at intake.

We recently admitted one of these small birds into our ICU after they were found lying on their back, struggling to move. During the initial exam, our technicians observed neurological symptoms, including loss of coordination and difficulty staying upright, along with some feather loss on the head. These signs are often associated with head trauma, typically caused by striking a window or being hit by a car. The patient was immediately started on anti-inflammatories, provided with fluid therapy, and placed on cage rest. Within two days, the bird appeared to have regained control of their body, but our team continued to monitor them closely and allowed time for the feathers to regrow.



Patient perching on side of small enclosure.

After a week in care and a successful test flight, our staff determined the patient was ready to move into an outdoor aviary. While the bird could fly, they tired easily and needed time to strengthen their flight muscles. This patient will be evaluated for release after about a week of conditioning. With continued care and support, our team is hopeful this Red-breasted Sapsucker will soon be ready to reenter the wild.