



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

February 27, 2026

After the Bloom, A Story of Strength

On February 19, 2025, California Wildlife Center received a report of an adult California Sea Lion showing signs of domoic acid toxicity at Leo Carrillo State Beach. Within days, hundreds of calls flooded our rescue hotline about ailing animals. By early March, affected marine wildlife had stranded across the Southern California coastline.



Patient admitted with domoic acid toxicity.



Patient 25-242 in care.

What began as a single call in Malibu quickly grew into a mass stranding event. The 2025 Domoic Acid Event was the most severe our region had faced in over a decade. The timing presented challenges, as neurologically affected marine wildlife began stranding during the height of Northern Elephant Seal pup season — when dozens of young, vulnerable patients were also in need of care.

During these busy months, we were often stretched to our limits. With overwhelming call volume, limited space, and critical patients filling every enclosure, difficult triage decisions had to be made. However, even when rescue is delayed, second chances are still possible.

As we reflect on the 2025 event, one patient's journey remains especially memorable to our team: the story of 25-242.

On April 24, 2025, Marine Program Manager Heather Henderson responded to a report of a California Sea Lion struggling in the rising tide and displaying signs of domoic acid toxicity. Due to limited rehabilitation space, a difficult extraction location and the approaching sunset, Heather safely moved the sea lion — later identified as #242 — higher up on the shore to rest. There, she administered subcutaneous fluids on the beach to help flush the toxin from her system.



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The following day, a team was dispatched to check on #242. She was found hiding inside a tree, wedged deep in the foliage. #242 was alert enough to thwart rescue attempts — wedging herself deeper into the structure. It was determined unsafe to proceed with the rescue, so trained staff administered supportive fluids, then moved to the next response.

For days, dozens of calls came in, but none regarding #242. On April 29, a volunteer was proactively dispatched to search for her. #242 was found hiding beneath porch stairs. This time, she was safely rescued and transported to CWC for continued care.



During rehabilitation, #242 experienced severe seizures — a common and devastating effect of domoic acid ingestion. Despite self-feeding after a short 3 days in care, her seizures worsened. Fearing permanent brain damage, our team remained determined to help her. An individualized treatment plan was created, and her medications were carefully adjusted. Within a few weeks, her seizure activity diminished, and she was ready to go home.

On May 29, 2025, #242 returned to the wild — strong, alert, and surrounded by the staff and volunteers who never stopped fighting for her second chance.

Patient 25-242 released.

Every call you make and every donation you give directly impacts an animal fighting to survive. When you take the time to report your findings on the beach to our team at 310-924-7256, you play a key role in an animal's story. Your donations provide the tools needed to successfully rehabilitate critical patients like #242: fluid therapy, nutritional support, medications to control seizures, and rehabilitation space. Second chances are possible through your support.