



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

March 27, 2026

Patient of the Week - Squirrel-ing Back to the Wild



Male Western Gray Squirrel in the NICU.

Western Gray Squirrels are a California native species and are often mistaken for non-native Eastern Fox Squirrels, who are commonly seen in parks and backyards. In contrast, Western Gray Squirrels are a more private species and prefer quieter woodland environments. We recently received two infant Western Gray Squirrels after their mother was reported deceased, leaving the two patients orphaned.

The squirrels (one female and one male) were admitted to our NICU depressed and emaciated, suggesting they had been without their mother for some time. They are being given a specialized formula that must be fed at frequent, carefully timed intervals. They have also been prescribed anti-inflammatories and antibiotics to treat wounds observed during their intake exams. The female squirrel was admitted with blood around her nose, possibly indicating head trauma. Both squirrels are being closely monitored.



Female Western Gray Squirrel, also receiving care in the NICU.

The Western Gray Squirrel, also known as the California Gray Squirrel, is a native tree squirrel found in forests and woodlands throughout the state. As their name suggests, they have gray fur with a white belly, and a long, bushy tail.

Western Gray Squirrels primarily eat acorns, seeds, and fungi. They often store food for later and frequently forget where they've hidden it, unintentionally helping new trees grow. Their digging also aerates the soil, promoting nutrient-rich soil. In addition, by eating underground fungi and spreading their spores, Western Gray Squirrels support the health and growth of forest ecosystems. These little animals do a lot to help their environment prosper and thrive!

Our wildlife technicians provide enrichment to help patients learn to live and thrive in the wild. This includes branches and greenery for climbing between cage levels. To encourage foraging, treats are hidden in shredded newspapers. Because storing food is an important skill, staff also provide dirt-filled bowls so the squirrels can practice digging and hiding food.

The patients are stable and steadily gaining weight. They will remain in the NICU until they reach an appropriate weight and have transitioned to a solid diet, at which point they'll be moved to our outdoor squirrel enclosures. With time, we are hopeful these small patients will return to their natural habitat, where they can once again play an important role in a thriving ecosystem.