



Wild Times

Spring 2026

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

Mourning Doves

By Dr. Guthrum Purdin, Veterinarian

Mourning Doves forage on the ground for small grains and seeds, much like grazing mammals such as deer and antelope. While such a pastoral life may seem peaceful, it attracts hungry predators. Just like lions stalk the tall grass for antelope, free-roaming house cats prowl yards and fields looking for doves and other small native wildlife. The toll they take can be staggering. It's estimated that on average, domestic cats kill 2.5 billion birds in the U.S. every year.

Dove 25-4323 was found by a member of the public late last year after surviving a cat attack. As prey animals, Mourning Doves, like deer, fight hard to escape, putting every ounce of energy into getting away. They are even able to loosen the attachments of their tail feathers as they try to escape, so that the cat winds up with nothing but a mouthful of feathers. The feathers grow back, but claw wounds can penetrate deeply into the skin. Plus, cats have a lot of bacteria on their claws. Whenever we get cat-caught doves, they are placed on antibiotics in addition to medication for pain and inflammation.

In this case, the dove had only one tail feather left, and skin wounds on the flanks, back, and elbows. Despite being so small and having hollow bones to reduce weight, doves are resilient creatures. Our medical team examined the dove and initiated a treatment plan, including bandaging and meds. In theory, it should have only taken a few weeks for 4323 to be healed and ready to return to the wild. Unfortunately, during a routine recheck and dressing change, I noticed the wounds were becoming inflamed and wet, the skin getting increasingly fragile and easily torn. The bacteria from the cat's claws was turning out to be worse than usual, and the skin was becoming infected despite standard medication.

Having seen cases like this before, I knew what additional medications needed to be added, and the wounds would need to be kept especially clean. Dove 4323 was a real fighter, resistant to human approach and much harder to handle than usual for a dove. Every wound cleaning and dressing change needed to be done with extreme care, as thorough and stress-free as possible, while tailoring the bandaging to stay on an especially jumpy bird. This would keep the wounds from getting worse and prevent additional feathers from being shed or broken.

It took about twice as long as usual, but I'm very happy to report that this tough little dove has now been released and is back with the flock, and able to continue his life. My thanks to the members of the public who took the time to rescue this bird and to the staff and volunteers here at CWC, who worked so hard on his behalf. If I may add one final thought: keeping cats indoors is safer for your pets and for the many native animals they may encounter.

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Stranding Season and Second Chances

By Alexis Sierra, RVTg, Stranding Coordinator

In February of 2025, the Marine Mammal Department looked very different than it does today. We were just returning to our hospital after evacuating during the Palisades Fire and had no patients in care. Although we typically receive an influx of calls related to early-weaned and malnourished California Sea Lion pups from December through February, reports were unusually low. At the start of 2026, as we reflected on the year prior, staff and volunteers awaited the arrival of our first patient—uncertain of what may lie ahead.

On January 8, we received our first call of the year for a stranded California Sea Lion pup—officially marking the start of the 2026 Stranding Season! This pup arrived early-weaned and severely malnourished, with significant inflammation around his neck and jaw. He also displayed labored breathing, a potential indicator of respiratory disease. While extremely critical upon intake, he has made encouraging progress in care. His swelling has significantly reduced, his respirations have normalized, and he is now happily eating whole fish.



California Sea Lions in care

Our second patient of the year was reported on January 20 at Broad Beach: an underweight, early-weaned pup “stuck in the rocks.” After safely rescuing the pup, our team observed a severe predator wound on the right side of her body. Her intake exam also revealed extremely swollen and abscessed rear flippers, further indicating predation. Despite the severity of her injuries, this pup maintained a spunky attitude and quickly began eating fish. We’re happy to report that her wounds continue to heal well!



Sea Lion rescued on January 8th

On January 28, our third patient of the year was rescued from Malibu Road. At first glance, her small size led us to believe she was a pup, but her intake exams revealed she was actually a yearling, in the process of molting. She presented extremely malnourished, with parasites, gastrointestinal upset, and trauma to both eyes. Our team is working to treat her underlying infection and hope to guide this critical patient through recovery.

The 2026 Stranding Season has already proven to be an eventful one, with several critical patients in care. We are incredibly grateful to the members of the public who reported these animals to our team. These animals receive a second chance because of YOU—by noticing, caring, and reporting animals in need. If you see a stranded marine mammal, please call or text us at 310-924-7256.

Soaring to New Heights

By Kristen Kanatzar, Hospital Manager

This time of year, November through February, is referred to as our slow season, simply because we receive significantly fewer patients daily than we do during the summer months. This slow season, however, has been anything but, as we have admitted an unusually large number of birds of prey in addition to our usual caseload.

So far, we have admitted 41 hawks and 18 owls from a variety of species. By far the most common species are Red-tailed Hawks and Great Horned Owls, but we also regularly see Barn Owls, Red-shouldered Hawks, and Cooper’s Hawks. During an average slow season, we do see an increase in birds of prey, but this year seemed exceptional. In December alone, we admitted 19 hawks and 8 owls. Twelve of these hawks arrived within 15 days, nearly one hawk per day. Overall, we have cared for 30% more hawks and 38% more owls than at this time last year, though that isn’t the only reason the season feels busier.

In addition to the uptick in the number of patients, the raptors we have admitted are arriving with more serious injuries. Many hawks and owls have shown trauma typical of being hit by cars, from fractures and head injuries to wing deficits and, sometimes, eye damage. With injuries this severe, the time each patient spends in care can vary greatly, with some requiring several months to heal and recover fully.

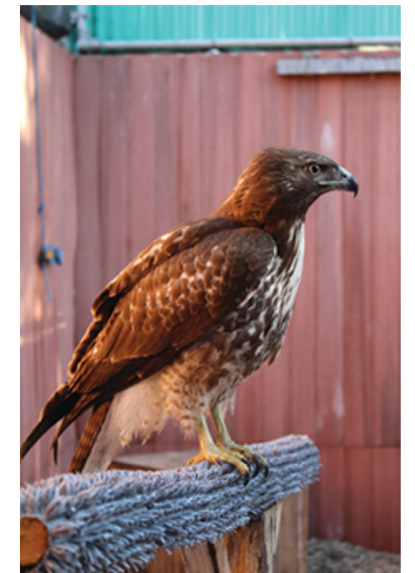
With the increase in storms in December and January, we also saw a larger number of hawks and owls come in cold, wet, and emaciated. Many of these cold and wet birds likely came in hypothermic because their shelter became inadequate as the rain progressed. The emaciated birds may have struggled to find food or were themselves displaced due to the rain. During big storms, every animal is impacted in some way.

Although the increase in birds of prey was unexpected, we adapted and learned to manage a higher-than-usual caseload of special-needs patients. In early January, we had 18 raptors in care, more than we’ve ever had at any one time. Thankfully, our wonderful staff and volunteers worked together to ensure every patient received the best care possible, adjusting along the way, so we didn’t run out of our limited resources.

Getting to care for these incredible animals, watching them heal and overcome the injuries or illnesses that brought them to us, and finally seeing them released, is one of the most rewarding parts of this job. Even though the recent increase in birds of prey brought some unexpected challenges, it is all worth it to watch them soar back into the wild.



Great Horned Owl patient



Red-tailed Hawk patient

The Education Corner: Nests

By Cambria Wells, Education and Outreach Manager

With the arrival of Spring, CWC always alerts our neighbors to stop trimming trees and bushes unless absolutely necessary. We warn about giving space to nesting animals, particularly nesting birds. But bird nests can be hard to find. So, what are you really looking for around your home?

Cup: Cup nests are the most common nest type found around homes. The small cup nests of many backyard songbirds often include a variety of materials including grasses, small twigs, lichen, moss, animal fur, and even spiderwebs. *(continued on page 4)*

Contributors

Dr. Guthrum Purdin, DVM
Alexis Sierra, RVTg
Kristen Kanatzar
Cambria Wells

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California Wildlife Center
P.O. Box 2022
Malibu, CA 90265
Emergency Hotline: 310-458-WILD
Fax: 818-222-2685
Email: admin@kawildlife.org
www.kawildlife.org



P.O. Box 2022 Malibu, CA 90265

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Suspended: Suspended nests may be cups or more elaborate, dome-shaped or sock-like structures. These are often either woven from vegetation, or are adherent structures made by combining mud and saliva.

Cavity: Some birds seek additional protection by constructing their nest within a sheltered cavity, such as the holes made by an Acorn Woodpecker.

Platform: Platform nests come in a variety of styles, but in backyard environments they are typically constructed of sturdy sticks on a flat surface. Some may be large and elaborate, like that of many hawks, and others may be thin or hastily constructed, like many doves' nests.

Though we've barely scratched the surface of the diversity of nesting birds, looking out for these four nest styles will go a long way in helping to avoid disturbing a growing family. Remember to save tree trimming for November through January and give active nests their space. If you're lucky enough to find a nest where you can safely observe it from a distance, take your time to enjoy nature at work!



Finch nest (classic cup nest)



Acorn Woodpecker nest cavity (cut open by tree care workers)