



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

June 5, 2026

Patient of the Week - The Featured Fawns of the Season

Every year we receive orphaned Mule Deer fawns. While each case is unique, the circumstances that bring them to us are often similar year to year, typically involving true or suspected orphaning or medical concerns. In all cases, the common factor is that the fawns have been separated from their mothers too early to survive on their own in the wild. Mule Deer are born from April through June and are nursed by their mothers throughout the summer before being weaned in the fall.

We currently have two fawns in care, both rescued from the Santa Barbara area. One female fawn was found alone beside a creek, where sadly her sibling was discovered deceased nearby. The second patient, a male, was found orphaned, emaciated, and dehydrated. Due to their young age, both fawns were promptly placed on a formula diet and closely monitored as they adjusted to care.

The male fawn adapted quickly, learning to latch well and steadily gaining weight. The female, however, initially required more supportive care. She was admitted with small lacerations on her head and rear that were promptly cleaned and treated with antibiotics and pain medication, and her wounds have since resolved. Interestingly, an oral exam revealed that she was missing several lower incisors, with only about five visible instead of the typical eight. Fawns generally begin losing their baby incisors around 6–10 months of age and, based on this patient's weight, she is likely only a few weeks old. During her initial evaluation, she had difficulty latching, which our veterinarian suspects may have been related to the missing teeth. Since then, she has improved and now appears to be eating well and developing appropriately.



Fawns are housed in a hay-lined mew at night.



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Mule Deer are highly social animals and naturally travel in groups for protection. Because of this, fawn patients are housed together in shared enclosures to support their social needs. While in care, fawns spend nights in hay-lined mews and have access to large outdoor enclosures during the day, where they can move freely, explore, and interact with one another. As they continue to develop, they will gradually transition to a diet that includes a variety of natural leafy greens.

It is also important to note that deer are particularly susceptible to Capture Myopathy and habituation, which means that medical and rehabilitative care must be carried out very carefully to avoid triggering this often fatal condition. To minimize stress, CWC staff take great care to limit stimuli and reduce human interaction whenever possible. One way this is achieved is by wearing full camouflage outfit during necessary medical procedures. In addition, staff monitor fawns primarily via cameras and one-way mirrors, with direct interaction kept to a minimum.

California Wildlife Center cares for fawns through the fall, at which point they are soft released together on-site. Mule Deer are one of the few species released directly from the CWC property. One reason for this “soft release” approach is that deer are highly sensitive to stress, making it essential to minimize unnecessary trauma that can result from transport. Additionally, releasing them on-site encourages their integration into the local Mule Deer herd that inhabits this area of the Santa Monica Mountains.

We look forward to continuing the rehabilitative care for these young fawns and hope that, upon their release this fall, they will successfully join the local herd.



Fawn patients are given formula from a bottle rack.