CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE CENTER
SINCE 1998

Wild Times

Winter 2026

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

A Veterinarian's View: the results of shooting wildlife

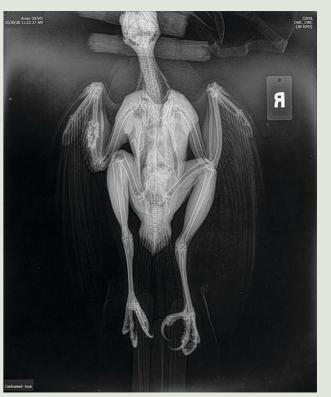
Dr. Lauren Michaels, Director of Animal Care

This fall, a coyote (Canis Latrans; case # 26-5025) was brought through California Wildlife Center's (CWC) clinic doors with a gunshot wound to the neck, confirmed by exam and radiographs (x-rays). He had also been hit by a vehicle, and together these injuries resulted in traumatic brain injury. The gunshot wound likely led to the second injury, putting a motorist at risk as well. Despite weeks of intensive care, this animal's case still had a grave prognosis.

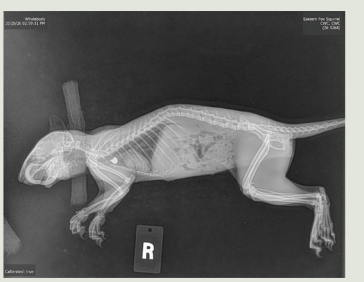
Gunshot cases due to bullets, BBs, and pellets peak in fall and winter, but CWC has seen a rise in summer cases over the past couple of years. Like this coyote, many patients who are shot are not killed outright. Raptors (hawks, falcons, and owls) are the most common. Wing fractures leave them unable to fly or hunt, leading to starvation or sepsis (systemic infection). If an injured bird reaches a specialized rehabilitation center in time, they are likely to face at least six weeks of care, which may include wound care, surgery, diagnostic imaging, physical therapy, and flight conditioning. Even then, there is no guarantee that the injury is surgically repairable, as was the unfortunate case for Cooper's Hawk (Astur Cooperii; case #26-5243) that could not be released.



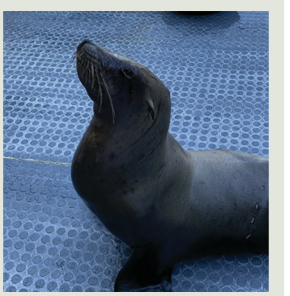
Coyote (case #26-5025) with bullet fragments in the neck



Pellet shot Cooper's Hawk (case #26-5243) with left ulnar wing fracture



Pellet shot Eastern Fox Squirrel with left body wall injury



California Sea Lion (case #25-321) Gunshot wound to the left eye

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Inside: Our Record-Breaking Season, Education Corner: Autumnal Native Plants, Be a Hero for Wildlife this Giving Tuesday!

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In our clinic's experience and outside of legal, regulated hunting, most wildlife is shot out of fear, because the animal is seen as a pest, or for "sport". Shooting animals for any of these reasons is never justified. Hawks are protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and marine mammals by the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Most wildlife poses little danger, and better solutions exist. Start by removing food sources and trash and securing small livestock. CWC also offers wildlife coexistence talks with practical tips. If you find an injured wild animal, contact your local licensed wildlife rehabilitator. If you suspect the animal was shot, you may report it to the CalTIP line at 1-888-334-2258.

The patients whose images you see in this article were not injured by accident. These injuries resulted from a choice, one every one of us can refuse to make. Each call to a rehabilitator gives an animal a second chance. Red-shouldered Hawk (Buteo Lineatus; case #26-3183) sustained a left ulnar fracture of the wing and was successfully released back to the wild. A subadult California Sea Lion (Zalophus Californianus; case #25-321) who was shot in the left eye survived surgery, proved that they could still hunt and find fish, and was released back into the ocean. Share your local wildlife rehabilitation center's information with your neighbors and help build a community where people and wildlife coexist in a healthier way.

Our Record-Breaking Season

By Kristen Kanatzar, Hospital Manager

Here at California Wildlife Center, we are used to the trials and tribulations that come with each season. No two seasons are ever alike, and each brings its own challenges, surprises, and opportunities to learn and adapt. This season, however, seemed to bring eight months of unexpected events.

This year, our busy season spanned from the first week of March to the middle of October. Over those 33 weeks, we admitted 4,782 animals. To put that number into perspective, we admitted 3,714 animals during the same period last season, meaning we admitted over 1,000 more animals this year.

Our online database was implemented in 2013, and in 13 years, this has been the busiest season on record. Last year's season is the second busiest, with 4,333 patients admitted from January 1st through December 31st. With admissions reaching record levels in consecutive years, it is clear that the need for wildlife rehabilitation continues to grow.

We have seen an overall increase in House Finches, Virginia Opossums, Hummingbirds, and Mallards, all of which are among our most common patients each season. Regardless of the patient numbers, our medical team remained committed to giving each and every one of our patients the best care possible. As weather patterns fluctuate, human-wildlife encounters increase, and natural resources become more limited, we expect to see even more animals in need of help in the coming years.

Education Corner: Autumnal Native Plants

By Cambria Wells, Education & Outreach Manager

There's a common joke that Los Angeles has no seasons. It's not an unfair perspective; our mild climate can mean that in urban and suburban environments, signs of the season are difficult to recognize. We often plant our gardens and outdoors spaces with evergreen ornamental plants from other areas, but when we turn to the native plants of Southern California, they tell a different story. CWC's location in the Santa Monica Mountains is home to native plants whose natural reactions to the changing temperatures and shorter days show us clearly that Autumn is in full swing.

Directly behind CWC's Intensive Care Unit building is an especially large and successful Toyon (Heteromeles Arbutifolia). These shrubs from the rose family produce clusters of ruby-red berries in winter, providing a vital food source for migratory birds. Our team enjoys watching crowds of Hermit Thrushes take up residence in our Toyon over the winter every year.

In front of CWC's buildings, in our garden beds, an assortment of plants that have brought us colorful flowers and lush foliage all summer are now falling into dormancy. Particularly dramatic is the Purple Sage (Salvia Leucophylla), which leaves "skeletons" of its flowers behind as seed heads. CWC leaves seed heads on the plants in our garden beds when possible, to provide natural food sources for songbirds.

Always richly green, but never taken for granted, the Coast Live Oaks (Quercus Agrifolia) which shelter the land CWC sits on, are showing the season in their own way. Acorns sit heavy among their leaves at this time of year, and litter the ground, feeding woodpeckers, jays, deer, squirrels, insects and more. It takes an oak tree 20-30 years to become mature and produce acorns; Coast Live Oaks often take much longer, with their average lifespan typically measured in centuries.



Toyon

If you start to long for a place that really "feels like fall" this year, look no further than your nearest trailhead. To bring that feeling home for years to come, and help wildlife, plant native California wildflowers, shrubs and trees in your yard.



This Giving Tuesday, you can Be a Hero for Wildlife by giving a gift that makes a difference!

There are so many ways to support our patients this giving season. Below are a few ideas:

For the Animal Lover: Animal Sponsorships
Give the gift of a favorite species! Sponsorships help provide essential medical care and rehabilitation for wildlife patients and include a personalized certificate, color photo, and species fact sheet.

For the Wildlife Champion: Conservation Circle Memberships
Give a gift that lasts all year. Members enjoy exclusive behind-the-scenes opportunities while supporting wildlife care, education, and conservation.

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Wild Times

Publisher California Wildlife Center

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For Someone Special: Tribute Gifts
Honor a birthday, anniversary, holiday, or the memory of a loved one with a meaningful donation that helps wildlife.

For the Sweet Tooth: See's Candy
Make the season sweeter! A portion of every See's Candy purchase through December 4 supports wildlife in need.





For Those Who Like To Wear Their Support
Find something fun for the wildlife lover in your life! Shop our new online merchandise store featuring CWC gear and gifts.

And remember, you don't have to shop to make a difference. A donation to CWC helps provide lifesaving care to injured, orphaned, and sick wildlife.

However you choose to give, you can be a hero for wildlife.