Tracks

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By this time of year, we’re all breathing a sigh of relief. The long season of spiked animal intakes is finally slowing down a bit. One day in July the Center admitted 51 animals, a record number for a 24-hour period!

Our terrific group of 20 interns has returned to school. Our faithful year-round volunteers are still busy caring for lots of late babies—squirrels and opossums. So while it may be slowing down in terms of numbers of animals, we have much less help on a daily basis and still have hundreds of animals at the Center or in home care.

As of this writing, we’ve admitted over 3,800 animals to the Center. Most of our songbirds have been released, and the majority of our raptors have also flown the coop, so to speak. Our two foxes are gearing up and getting ready to prance down that road to freedom shortly! Lots of squirrels, opossums, raccoons, waterbirds and more are flying (and walking) out the door. It’s the best part of what we do—knowing that these lucky animals are getting another chance to prosper! This year has seen some unusual events—from a beaver that became entangled in some plastic strapping to a group of orphaned nesting grackles. And yet another Yellow-bellied Marmot that climbed into an engine compartment of a vehicle and hitched a ride to the Bay Area. I’m happy to say that the beaver was quickly released once freed of the plastic strapping, the grackles successfully raised and returned to the wild and the marmot brought back to its origins in the Sierra Nevadas where we hope he lived happily ever after!

Our education team has been working hard to provide inspiring wildlife-based presentations to as many classrooms and community groups as they can and have also been busy attending many outreach events. One of our goals we have yet to meet has been to obtain extra funding to take our programs, free of charge, into the numerous Title 1 schools in the County and get our message delivered to disadvantaged youth who might otherwise not have the chance to connect with the natural environment around them.

We’ve had a great season in our 20th year of serving the South Bay Area. We certainly recognize the fact that we couldn’t do it without the tremendous support we get from you. And we are thankful to be recognized as the go-to facility for a sick or injured wild animal. We’re making great strides and are committed to continuing our mission to provide the highest quality care we can to all those thousands of animals as we continue to educate children and adults alike to co-exist with our wild neighbors. Can you help us continue to offer the important programs we do? We hope you’ll consider making a generous donation. Simply said, we could not do this without your help.

We wish you a season of hope, thanks and appreciation for all that nature has to offer.

Janet Alexander
Director of Operations

The Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley is a California nonprofit organization that since 1993 has been committed to providing the highest quality care and rehabilitation to urban wildlife and to promoting a mutually beneficial and respectful coexistence between humans and wildlife in our communities.

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Tracks is a biannual publication of the Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley.

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Tracks…across the backyard, along a wooded trail, meandering by a creek. Whose tracks are they? Are they coming or going? Perhaps they are the tracks of things past, or of visions to be revealed, and stories yet untold. Come join us as we explore different dimensions of wildlife rehabilitation and the special wild neighbors with whom we share our communities. It is the intention of this publication to investigate our dynamic relationship with wildlife within the greater context of our relationship with the earth and each other. The issues are many, as are the myths, feelings, and beliefs surrounding each one. At what level is rehabilitation to be found for the animal or human animal, or the earth? Let’s follow the tracks, wherever we may find them, and leave our own for those who may follow.
With a distinctively loud, rattling call and top-heavy bodies smaller than that of a crow, it’s likely you’ll hear a Belted Kingfisher before seeing it. Kingfishers are quick to fly from perch to perch, but when you are lucky enough to spot one, these unique birds are unmistakable. They have short legs and a head that seems a bit too large for the relatively small body size. That may be due in part to the ridge of feathers adorning the heads of kingfishers, running from the very top all the way down to the back of their necks. Their straight, long, thick beaks belie their fish-hunting habits.

All Belted Kingfishers have a bluish-gray head and body, with white feathers on their neck, chest, stomach, and most of the area underneath each wing. Unlike most other avian species, Belted Kingfisher females are more brightly colored than the males. Males have only one blue-gray band around their necks, while females have an extra band. This second, lower band is an attractive, rusty, cinnamon-brown shade.

If you haven’t yet seen them in and around the South Bay, the best place to look is along shorelines, since they rely on these areas for food and shelter. Belted Kingfishers are one of few avian species to nest in and dig their own burrows. Otherwise solitary, these birds find different mates each breeding season. During this time, the pairs work together to dig their burrows that stretch about 3–6 feet deep into earth embankments along a water source. If you notice burrow entrances even in the late fall or winter when they aren’t in use, keep your ears open for the loud identifying rattle of the kingfisher.

By Jen Constantin

Olive is a Western Screech Owl and an educational animal at WCSV

Each year WCSV provides treatment for poisoned wildlife. These animals include rats, mice, squirrels, snakes, pigeons, mourning doves, hawks, owls, and skunks. Most of these individuals are unintended victims taking advantage of what appears to be easy, slow-moving prey, or others who have happened upon to be a tantalizing bit of food.

If you’ve ever had problems with rats or other rodents, it can be an extremely difficult situation to handle. These small prey animals are attracted to shelter (low vines, shrubs, and ground cover near homes, which can then lead them inside) and access to food (garbage, pet food, seed fallen from feeders, etc.). Rodents have it made when they can find everything they need to thrive in one area, and we so often unwittingly invite them to our doorsteps.

The good news is that there are a number of options. Preventative measures and humane alternatives provide sustainable solutions to rodent problems. A good rule of thumb is to be sure to avoid providing their basic needs. Eliminate any access to human and pet food, including ripe fallen fruit and bird seed. Be sure to block all access to the inside of your home. Natural predators provide an excellent, free source of rodent control. Allow the snakes, coyotes, foxes, bobcats, raccoons, hawks, and owls to do what they do best!

At WCSV we advocate against rodenticides. The use of poison as a source of rodent control is problematic for a number of reasons. All poisons contain anticoagulants, but some contain even more dangerous “second generation” anticoagulants as active ingredients which include: brodifacoum, bromadiolone, difenacoum, and difethialone. The EPA has been working to ban all rodenticides on the market containing any of the second generation ingredients because of the health and safety risks they pose to children, pets, and non-target wildlife (go to: epa.gov/pesticides/mice-and-rats/cancellation-process.html#cancellation). Far too often, poison is consumed by unintended victims either directly, or through the ingestion of another poisoned animal.

Even if rodenticides are consumed indoors by mice or rats, it’s quite common that these animals can still make their way back outside once poisoned. At that point they are slow, suffering, and become easy prey for raptors and predatory mammals—even pets. And the cycle continues.

CREATURE FEATURE Belted Kingfisher

PHOTO:  “MIKE” MICHAEL L. BAIRO

PHOTO: KEVIN COLE

PHOTO: DAVE CONSTANTIN

PHOTO: KEVIN COLE

PHOTO: DAVE CONSTANTIN

Olive’s Words of Wisdom The problem with poisons: What we don’t know can hurt

The problem with poisons: What we don’t know can hurt

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OVERFLOWING WITH OPOSSUMS

So far this year we’ve received 606 Common Opossum patients—a record-breaking number! They, of course, come through our doors at all stages of life and need care for any number of reasons. Opossums sustain some of the worst injuries we see at the Center because of their natural tendency to freeze and play dead rather than pounce and attack or even run away. The majority of these 606 opossums were orphaned because their mothers were killed by cars. Other top reasons why we see them are because of dog and other predator attacks and joeys falling off their mothers and getting separated before they can fend for themselves. We have a tremendous team of on-site and homecare volunteers who help staff tend to all their needs, even round-the-clock.

Cruelty cases are the most tragic and frustrating, and in mid-July a very kind couple, on their early morning walk in Parkview Park in San Jose, found a juvenile opossum that had been shot with three darts and left in a garbage can. Two of the darts were lodged in the opossum’s head, and one at the base of the tail. His back legs were weak and he was suffering from head injuries and a swollen left eye. Unfortunately, the attacker was not identified, but thanks to the generosity and compassion of the pair that found and brought him to the Center, his injuries were treated, have healed, and he is enjoying his second chance at freedom.

GOOD YEAR FOR GREAT HORNED OWLS

This has certainly also been a busy rehabilitation year for Great Horned Owls. In the month of April alone we received four Great Horned owlets, all within a 10-day period. Ranging in age from downy, fluff-ball nestlings to pre-fledglings just beginning to trade those warm, downy feathers for adult flight plumage to a fledgling who had just begun to fly. They all came in with injuries that prevented them from being re-nested. Luckily, though, they had each other for that necessary company only another Great Horned Owl can provide. In mid-May we received one more pre-fledgling who joined the others to make five!

Did you know that each one of these birds can eat 12–15 mice each night? That nightly bill of $75 adds up fast! These feathered beauties have spent the last five months learning how to fly and hunt in our brand-new 50-foot flight enclosure. This space has been instrumental in giving them the highest quality care, which was evident on September 21 when two of them flew strongly away at Los Lagos Golf Course during our fall fundraising event (see page 10). The remaining three will soon follow. In fact, by the time you have this in your hands, they will be off, experiencing all a wild life has to offer.
Western Pond Turtles are becoming a rare sight in the Bay Area. With their shy disposition and nondescript dark brown shell, many people may not have the chance to see our area’s only native turtle. They live in lakes, ponds, streams and creeks and may occasionally be seen on land traveling between water sources. Turtles will sit out in the sun on logs or rocks but will quickly dive back into the water if they sense someone approaching. Western Pond Turtles are classified as a Species of Special Concern, according to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and listed as a vulnerable species by the IUCN Red List. Threats to pond turtles include the encroachment of humans into their habitat and the introduction of non-native species. One of their biggest competitors in their ponds and streams are introduced Red-eared Sliders (see right sidebar). The Slider is more aggressive and tends to take over territory from Western Pond Turtles and out-compete them for food.

On July 10, an individual brought in an adult male Western Pond Turtle from San Jose that was reported to have two heads. During the turtle’s physical exam, the staff found that the turtle had a large aural (in the ear) abscess, was dehydrated, and had signs of a respiratory infection. The abscess was, indeed, as large as the turtle’s head and it’s easy to see why it was thought to be a two-headed turtle! The staff started the turtle on antibiotics and set up a consultation with Dr. Curt Nakamura at Adobe Animal Hospital in Los Altos.

With Dr. Nakamura’s help, the turtle’s abscess was drained and cleaned. After this and several days of antibiotics, the upper respiratory signs cleared up. Since turtles heal very slowly, the staff knew he would be a long-term case and he was placed in homecare with a staff member to continue treatment to keep the open abscess clean and administer the antibiotics.

After two more visits to Dr. Nakamura, the turtle’s abscess was finally infection-free and sutures were placed on August 17 to help the abscess close. However, the original infection was present for so long that a bony ridge formed along one side of the abscess. This means that the turtle will always have a bump on the side of his head, but the great news is that this does not affect his ability to eat, evade predators, or mate. After two months of in-home, diligent care, the Western Pond Turtle was released back to his home pond in mid-September.

Red-eared Sliders

Red-eared Sliders are native to the southern United States and are the most popular species of pet turtle. They have a red patch on the sides of their head and a dark green shell with lighter colored markings. They grow up to 13 inches long and require a lot of care. Unfortunately, many people who no longer want their pet turtles often release them into local ponds and streams. This has been a major cause of the decline of Western Pond Turtles because of the introduction of new diseases to those habitats and competition over resources. If you have a pet turtle that you would like to surrender, please contact your local animal shelter for more information so that they can find a new home in captivity.
BREAKING RECORDS AND BEATING THE ODDS

A gull’s story of strength and fortitude

By Jen Constantin

Utah’s state bird, an “aeronautic wizard,” and a savior to agriculturalists, the California Gull has been described and viewed in many positive ways. Living in large colonies, thousands of California Gulls descending on a farmer’s field can make a significant dent in nuisance insect populations around important crops in a matter of hours. Of course, there’s always an opposite side to every coin. Being an opportunistic forager who consumes far more than just insects, California Gulls have a wide palate resulting in their earning a negative reputation in some circles for being attracted to landfills and the nesting sites of other birds, including the Snowy Plover, terns, and avocets, for sources of food.

California Gulls live in and around the Bay Area year round along with other gulls, such as Western and Herring Gulls, who share similar physical characteristics. At different stages of their development and plumage it can be extremely difficult for a novice birder to differentiate between a juvenile California Gull and a Herring Gull, for example. Looking for leg and beak color differences can steer one in the right direction. California Gulls have yellow-green legs and once fully mature, have a black ring with red dot on the beak.

On Saturday, August 10, an adult California Gull was transferred to the Wildlife Center from the Humane Society Silicon Valley (HSSV). An anonymous party found the gull in Santa Clara unable to walk or fly, and kindly took the bird to HSSV the previous evening. Right away, WCSV staff noticed the bird was federally banded – the metal band on his left leg contained numbers assigned to him at some point in his past that would soon reveal a remarkable glimpse into his individual history. A quick call to the United States Geological Bird Banding Laboratory at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland and we discovered that he had been banded by the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory in 1985! In Mountain View at the time of banding, he was a young, pre-fledgling gull who couldn’t quite fly yet. In other words, this gull currently in our care is 28 years old and making history. He is the oldest living California Gull on record—no pressure.

The gull’s full examination and radiographs revealed no fractures or dislocations, or even injuries of any kind. Upon intake he was severely emaciated and dehydrated, and this weakened state made his capture possible. While our fecal tests did not reveal any internal parasites, he did need to be treated for feather lice that had caused some feather damage. In the face of these struggles though, he was notably bright and alert.

The first few days of rehabilitative care were difficult for this aging gull. Despite his extremely emaciated state he would not eat on his own, and instead had to be fed a liquid seabird diet via feeding tube. Five days into treatment, he not only began eating on his own but he was finally able to stand! From that point on he really began to shine. Within two weeks he was moved to an outdoor enclosure to experience sunshine, fresh air, water ponds, and a larger space to gain strength. He still was not able to fly, but this would be his best opportunity.

Roughly a month after initially coming into our hospital, this California Gull began flying at low heights. With more time and quality care we are confident he can be released—once again free to continue making history.
Burrowing Owls are among the most common birds that we see wearing federal bands upon intake. They are observed and tracked regularly because of their low population numbers and Species of Special Concern conservation status. The Burrowing Owl in these pictures suffered severe bruising and temporarily lost use of his legs after he was hit by a drunk driver who crashed through a chain-link fence on Moffett Field. He miraculously did not have any broken bones and was released right back to his burrow on Moffett Field on August 2, 2013, after nearly two months of recovery time with us. Special thanks to Christopher Alderete, NASA Wildlife Biologist, for making this owl’s re-homing possible!

Another Banded Bird Returns Home

Bird Banding History

Did you know that the first record of bird banding dates back to 1595, after one of King Henry IV’s Peregrine Falcons was found with a metal band on its leg 1350 miles from “home?” Bird banding began formally and on a small scale far later in North America in 1902, thanks to naturalist Paul Bartsch. Then in 1920, Frederick Lincoln established the North American Bird Banding Program, which set standards and promoted the use of bird banding in scientific research. Locally, the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory began banding birds in 1982, and capturing invaluable knowledge about local and migratory species. All bird banding information is stored with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and provides valuable insight into migration patterns and distances, longevity details, population counts, and behavior of numerous avian species. The metal bands secured onto one or both legs of captured birds allow them to be easily identified by field researchers and anyone who happens upon and reports finding them either living or deceased.

Resources:
- http://www.sfbbo.org

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**Patient Gallery**  
Who’s on the mend at WCSV

This pre-fledgling Western Bluebird (top left) had been found on the ground, but was very healthy. Thanks to Lee Pauser and the busy Western Bluebird parents, this bird was successfully re-nested with others at the same stage of life in an active nest box at Santa Teresa County Park.

Non-releasable Red Fox who is now participating in public education programs at Blank Park Zoo in Des Moines, Iowa.

American Kestrels brought to us as very thin fledglings by Silicon Valley Animal Control Authority in May, were released together just about 1.5 months later.

Mallard eggs in an incubator marked for rotation.

Western Scrub Jay fledgling almost ready for release.

Varied Thrush during rehabilitation after being caught by a dog.

Red-tailed Hawk preparing to take flight in one of the raptor flight enclosures.

Nesting Western Scrub Jays making themselves easy targets for food.

Rachel Atkins preparing a catheter for a Gray Fox during his first 24 hours of care.

PHOTO: RACHEL ATKINS

PHOTO: TRACI TSUKIDA

PHOTO: DON JEDLOVEC

PHOTO: ASHLEY KINNEY

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PHOTO: ASHLEY KINNEY

PHOTO: ASHLEY KINNEY

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Northern Raccoon curiously eyes the camera

Female Cooper’s Hawk brought to us by San Jose Animal Care and Services after being found emaciated and unable to fly

Cliff Swallows enjoying their nest — handcrafted to be the perfect shape to support their natural habits and development

Bewick’s Wrens gaping hungrily just before a feeding

Freedom?! This Striped Skunk was stuck in backyard netting for at least 8 hours before being found and brought in to WCSV for care and release.

Beautiful nestling American Avocet we temporarily cared for before she was transferred to International Bird Rescue

Acorn Woodpecker who was over-rescued, but re-united successfully with his family two days later

Fledgling Brown-headed Cowbird gaining strength in an outdoor aviary to make it on his own

Non-releasable Great Horned Owl with congenital cataracts will soon become a wildlife ambassador at the Youth Science Institute at Alum Rock Park

Great-tailed Grackle nestling from Livermore

One of two orphaned Gray Foxes transferred to us from Native Animal Rescue

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RAISING AWARENESS THROUGH COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In addition to the education programs we provide to school and community organizations, we also appreciate the value of informal education. Each year we participate in a number of community outreach festivals sponsored by other organizations as well as our own annual ‘Walk on the Wild Side.’ Can you believe there are still many who have never heard about the Wildlife Center? Please help us spread the word!
Networking Keeps Wildlife Rehabilitation Strong

By Ashley Kinney

Each year we are increasingly awestruck by the number of caring, knowledgeable and passionate wildlife rehabilitators from hospitals all over the state. Every wildlife facility has their own passion, their own skill, which benefits hundreds upon thousands of species throughout the state of California. Whenever the Wildlife Center is presented with a case that we are unfamiliar with, or deal with a particular species that we cannot appropriately house, we reach out to other wildlife organizations for help. Every species is unique and comes with many different prerequisites, which makes it impossible for any hospital to “specialize” in all local wildlife. Whether we have a young mammal that needs a conspecific to prevent imprinting, a bat that needs surgery to repair a fractured humerus, or a vulture that needs to gain strength in a large flight enclosure when ours are full, WCSV has an invaluable network of rehabilitation centers to reach out to. The opposite is true as well, as we annually provide care for a wide variety of species for other facilities who simply cannot. The wildlife rehabilitation community is so vital, so powerful and continues to progress each year. Due to the help and knowledge other facilities have for species specific cases, WCSV has greatly improved animal care. We would like to take this time to thank two facilities that have helped WCSV during the 2013 spring/summer season.

Native Songbird Care and Conservation located in Sebastopol, CA. Their passion and endless knowledge of songbirds, and willingness to share all they know has helped WCSV provide the best care to these feathered beauties. WCSV has never released so many beautiful, healthy songbirds in all of our history. We would like to thank Veronica Bowers, Director of NSCC, specifically for her insight into diet and housing improvements for growing songbirds which has led to great strides in care and releases.

International Bird Rescue located in Fairfield, CA. IBR is an incredible hospital that provides care to all injured and orphaned waterbirds. The facility agreed to take all of WCSV’s waterbirds. At WCSV we are able to provide supportive care to most waterbirds until they transfer to IBR. We do not have adequately large ponds and flight enclosures that waterbirds require. Due to the kindness and support of IBR, WCSV was able to transfer 268 Mallards, eight Snowy Egrets, three Black-crowned Night Herons, and one Double-Crested Cormorant, which totals 280 birds! Thank you IBR for providing the best possible care to our native waterbirds!

Wildlife rehabilitation is not centered around one facility. We are united as a team to succeed in our mission of providing the best possible care to each individual species we receive. We are surrounded by hundreds of people dedicating their lives to making a difference for our native wildlife. Due to networking, and sharing an endless pool of information with one another, we are able to rehabilitate and release thousands of injured and orphaned wildlife each year.

Thank You

Acknowledging Some of our Invaluable Partners in Service
Adobe Animal Hospital
Dr. Fern Van Sant
Dr. Kate Cameron
Dr. Tina Burling
Don Jedlovec Photography
Kevin Norrad – Turtle and Tortoise Home
Whole Foods – Campbell

In memory of Patti McIntosh
(Apr 25, 1961 - Sept 13, 2013)
A remarkable mother, grandmother, and caring spirit who we had the fortune of knowing as a volunteer and friend for over 20 years. Patti will live on in the hearts of all who knew her and benefitted from her compassion.

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twitter.com/wildlife_center

If You Find an Animal in Distress
Visit wcsv.org or call WCSV at (408) 929-9453

WALK ON THE WILD SIDE
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2

YOU ARE INVITED TO A FREE, FUN-FILLED DAY OF WILDLIFE DISCOVERY!