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Release Highlights

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Directors’ Message

A snake on the cover of Tracks? Why a snake? Well, we here at the Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley thought it would be a great idea to profile an animal that probably wouldn't win a popularity contest, because we think that snakes and other reptiles are fascinating, misunderstood and a valuable part of the ecosystem.

They are as important to the world we live in as all other wildlife because they play a meaningful role, performing such functions as rodent control, which clearly is advantageous for us humans. When you think of the types of patients we care for, birds and squirrels probably come to mind. Reptiles (and amphibians) probably don't. However, at WCSV we take in all native California wildlife in Santa Clara County, because we believe they all deserve a second chance to be released back into their natural habitats.

Because of your generosity we are able to continue to give superior care seven days a week, 365 days a year to the over 5,600 animals we get in annually. Your gifts are so important as they are crucial to our patients’ rehabilitation and recovery. Each type of animal has special medical, dietary, housing, and enrichment needs which can be very expensive. However, it’s not just the type of animals we receive that strain our resources; it is also the duration of care that impacts the cost. Some of our patients are long-term, which means, depending on the animal, they could be with us for up to a year. As I write, we have ten coyote pups in care that will be with us for six months, because we need to release them during the time they would naturally disperse in the wild. The cost of care for those pups will be $20,000. We also have four young great horned owls that will stay with us for six months as they mature more slowly than other species, spending up to a year in the wild with their mother. The cost of their care will be $6,000.

It goes without saying that we couldn’t do this vital work for these animals without you. Our appreciation for your support of our mission to rehabilitate and release local wildlife is immeasurable. Every donation is meaningful and none too small. There are also other ways to help the Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley beyond making a cash donation. Please visit our website (wcsv.org) for more information about the programs and ideas below.

♦ Amazon Smile
♦ WCSV Amazon Wishlist
♦ A Bequest or Living Trust
♦ Vehicle Donations
♦ Employer Matching Programs
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With Gratitude,
Laura Hawkins, Executive Director

Tracks

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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Raising any baby raptor is difficult and no human can do the job as well as the bird’s parents can. For this reason, it is almost always preferable to re-nest a baby bird that has fallen from the nest than it is for humans to attempt to raise it. However, placing a baby bird of prey back in the nest comes with its own challenges, and isn’t always feasible for many different reasons. Important factors in renesting include where the nest is located, whether or not the parents are still inhabiting the nest, whether the raptor is healthy or injured etc...

**Successful Re-nesting Story**

On June 16th, we received a call from concerned homeowners who found a baby Common Barn Owl on the ground below their man-made owl box. Realizing that this fluffy owlet was too young to be on the ground on its own, they called to ask for advice and assistance. Because this owl was found in Morgan Hill, a city with an animal control agency that does not typically respond to wildlife, one of our experienced volunteers in the area responded to the call to assess the situation. When Shanna, our volunteer, arrived and evaluated the owl, it appeared to have no injuries from falling out of the nest. She consulted our Hospital Manager and the decision was made to try and re-nest the baby. With thick gloves and a lot of raptor handling experience, Shanna carefully placed the owl back into the box. When the owl was safely in the nest, she could see three other Barn Owl babies looking back. There were a total of four owlets! The next day, we received an update from the homeowners letting us know that the owl was still safe and sound in the nest box with its siblings.

**Owl Boxes**

Owl boxes are a great way to attract owls to your property. The most commonly installed owl boxes used are these boxes, because barn owls are not territorial. Many vineyards, farms, and orchards use barn owl boxes as an effective, natural, poison-free pest control method, but anyone can make and install owl boxes to attract these beautiful and beneficial predators to your area!

Rodenticides do not just harm their target species, but also poison animals that consume the poisoned rodents. This includes predators such as cats, dogs, hawks, owls, bobcats, foxes, etc. and scavengers such as vultures. Using rodenticides is bad for the entire food chain. A natural pest control method like barn owls is good for the environment, but rodenticides are not.

On average, a single barn owl eats at least one mouse a night. Young, growing barn owls require more: a single nest box of barn owls will eat 800 mice a season. Not only are there fewer rodents in areas with high raptor populations due to predation, but rodents build fewer burrows in these areas as well. Encouraging barn owls to nest and live in your area is a natural and poison-free way to decrease the population of rodents.

**“It’s not always so easy to return birds to their nest so it was great to be able to reunite this little guy with its natural family. And looking in the owl box and seeing so many faces staring back at me was unexpected and amazing!”**

Shanna Gamache, WCSV volunteer since 2016
**Patient Gallery** Here’s who is on the mend at WCSV

Four *Common Raven* fledglings were brought to our facility after their nest was removed from a tower. A structural emergency necessitated the removal of the nest, so unfortunately the nest was just in the wrong place at the wrong time! Although disturbing an active nest is illegal in the state of California, this particular company had authorization through the state. The Ravens have been in our care for 33 days and will spend another week here until they are ready to be returned to the wild! Fun Fact: Compared to American Crows, of which we admit hundreds annually, we typically receive no more than five Ravens each year.

This *Mourning Dove* came in with a very gruesome injury. This bird’s crop had been punctured, which would have been a fatal injury if left out in the wild. Doves use their crops to store and digest food. This organ is the first part of their digestive system. Left untreated, this bird would no longer be able to process food. We cleaned the wound, applied an ointment, and dressed it with a sterile waterproof dressing. The bird is healing well in our care and we hope to be able to release it in about three weeks.

This *California Scrub Jay* fell out of its nest and sustained a beak fracture, which cracked at its right nare. Animal care staff used medical tape and super glue to act as a cast (similar to paper mache). The Jay, who has been with us for 27 days, will be in our care until the beak heals and grows back. After recovering for up to two more weeks, the California Scrub Jay will be ready for release.

These two baby *Killdeers* were unique visitors at WCSV. Typically, we do not receive Killdeers this young. After a few days in our care, we transferred these waterbirds to International Bird Rescue, so they can grow up with other conspecifics.

These *Nuttall’s Woodpeckers* were orphaned due to tree trimming. Workers had checked the area but did not notice the woodpeckers’ nest until it was too late. They are cavity nesters, and the male will create a hole in a tree trunk to nest. This is why it’s important to thoroughly check trees before trimming or, even better, hold off on tree trimming until October, when nesting season is over. It is illegal to remove eggs and/or chicks from their nests.
This fledgling Western Bluebird was brought to us after it was caught by a cat. On its initial examination, it was obvious to our animal care staff that this bird was not using its hallux, suspecting a fracture. They devised a plan to fit this bird with a ‘shoe’. After five days with the shoe, this bird was perching more and able to hold its foot normally. Soon, this Western Bluebird will be ready for release.

In June we admitted two orphaned fledgling American Kestrels, America’s smallest and most common falcon found in Dublin, CA. They are in good condition and will be in our care for a couple of weeks until they will be ready to be returned to the wild. We typically only admit a few American Kestrels a year and these are among the youngest we have received in years!

This orphaned California Quail came in cold and barely moving. After stabilizing it in an incubator overnight with food and water, it had perked up and was looking much better. This California Quail will soon be transferred to our homecare volunteer who specializes in quail rehabilitation. In about three to four weeks, this bird will be ready for release. Fun Fact: The California Quail is California’s state bird.

Five Lodgepole Chipmunks were found in family’s trailer after they spent a weekend in Tahoe. Somehow, they hitched a ride from Tahoe to San Jose without their mom! They were only three weeks old and very cold. They will be with us until they are about 12 weeks old. At that point, we will bring them back to Tahoe to be released.
The snake featured on the cover of this edition of *Tracks* is a native Gopher Snake.

**Reason For Admission**

This snake was found in Gilroy after landscape workers were doing maintenance work and realized they had accidentally hit this snake with their weed whacker. An initial examination was performed by our animal care staff and they recorded the following.

**Initial Examination Findings**

- A one inch laceration on the left side of its upper body filled with dirt
- A 3/4th inch laceration mid-body on the right side
- Small abrasions around the mid-body
- A large wound on the left side of its neck
- A small puncture wound on the right side of its neck

**Treatment Plan**

Our wildlife technicians began treating its wounds by cleaning and debriding the lacerations to make sure they were free from dirt and infection. Then a topical ointment was applied and the lacerations covered with wound dressing. It was necessary to devise a long-term plan to treat the snake’s injuries due to the number and severity of its wounds.

Staff prescribed injectable antibiotics and pain medication, to be administered every three days. Dressing changes were done on medication days, so staff could monitor the wound sites, keep them clean, and minimize handling. The snake needed manual help shedding around the injury sites. This was done by applying warm water and carefully peeling the shedding skin around the wounds. Post-shed, we had to reassess its condition to see if sutures were necessary.

On 5/1 (21 days in care) – After this snake shed for the first time in our care, the shedding process exposed additional wounds randomly distributed around the body. The worst was a 5 cm long laceration to the right flank. Our staff decided it was necessary to suture these severe wounds as well. The snake was sedated to keep it and the staff safe during the procedure. Two of the large open wounds were cleaned and sutured closed with an *evertting mattress pattern* and glue applied to the suture knots. The other injuries were relatively minor and left open to heal under staff supervision. After suturing, our veterinarian removed some residual slough from the tip of the tail and around the broken skin of several wounds. Beyond these injuries, the snake was otherwise in good condition. It was placed in a recovery cage and kept warm after the procedure.

With injuries of this nature, it is important to keep the snake in care through a several sheds to ensure that the sutures hold and the injuries heal properly. Each shed also had to be assisted by our animal care staff. After the sutures

**Other Notes of Interest**

Eye caps are opaque, indicating that the snake is in pre-shed.
were removed a few weeks later, we then had to wait for it to shed without our assistance. Once we verified that the snake was able to shed normally and all the injuries were healed, it was ready to get back out into the wild!

**Release**

After 72 days in care and four full sheds, this Gopher Snake was released back in Gilroy to live a wild and healthy life in its natural habitat.

**Gopher Snake Natural History**

Gopher snakes are non-venomous. They play an important role in maintaining their local ecosystems, such as by keeping rodent populations at bay. Gopher snakes get their common name from their taste for gophers. People commonly mistake gopher snakes for rattlesnakes due to their similar colors and patterns. This type of imitation is called, Batesian mimicry, is a purposeful defense mechanism to ward off predators. Gopher Snakes are primarily diurnal, although they can be seen hunting at night.

**Drawing Showing Pre & Post-Shed Injuries**

![Drawing Showing Pre & Post-Shed Injuries](image)

Red = pre-shed injuries  
Blue = post-shed injuries

**Wildlife Rehabilitation Vocabulary**

- **Batesian mimicry**: A form of mimicry where a harmless species has evolved to imitate the warning signals of a harmful species directed at a predator of them both
- **Bird of Prey**: Raptor. A predatory bird distinguished by a hooked bill and sharp talons
- **Conspecifics**: a member of the same species
- **Debridng**: To remove damaged tissue and/or foreign objects from a wound
- **Diurnal**: Animals that are active during the day and then sleep at night
- **Emaciated**: Abnormally thin or weak, especially because of illness or a lack of food
- **Eye caps**: Also known as the brille; is the layer of transparent, immovable disc-shaped skin or scale covering the eyes of some animals for protection
- **Everting mattress pattern**: A suture technique
- **Flank**: The side of an animal's body between the ribs and the hip
- **Fledgling**: A young bird that has grown its flight feathers and is learning how to fly
- **Fracture**: A break, usually in a bone
- **Hallux**: Innermost digit (toe) of the hind foot of vertebrate animals
- **Necrosis/Necrotic**: The death of body tissue. It occurs when too little blood flows to the tissue.
- **Rodenticides**: A poison used to kill rodents
- **Shoe**: Covering of the foot to protect it and put digits in the correct position for healing
- **Sutured**: A stitch or row of stitches holding together the edges of a wound or surgical incision
- **Quarantined**: Isolated from other animals to prevent spread of infectious or contagious diseases
**Match That Scat!**

Scat identification is a good skill to have when hiking, camping, or just trying to identify scat in your own backyard. Scat provides important information about wildlife. It can tell you what species are in the area as well as the types of food they are eating. Scat comes in all shapes and sizes. Scats contain pieces of food that the animal could not digest. Identifying scat can be difficult but here are a few tips on deciphering them.

- What is the shape? Ex: Tapered at ends, tubular, pellets, twisted, plops
- What is found within the scat? Ex: Berries, hair, seeds, sawdust
- What color is it?
- How big is it?

**Common rules of thumb:**

Fruit/veggie eaters – Shapeless or loose tubes of crumbly material with blunt ends

Meat and Organs – Tubular, little to no twisting, smooth, blunt or tapered ends

Hair and Bones – Twisted, tapered ropes, pointy Ends

1. A. Deer
2. B. Skunk
3. C. Bobcat
4. D. Rabbit
5. E. Coyote
6. F. Gopher
7. G. Opossum
8. H. Raccoon

**Answers:** 1H, 2E, 3F, 4D, 5B, 6A, 7C, 8G

*Drawing by WCSV Volunteer, Jane Jacob*
This **American Crow** came to us caught in a snap trap. Once animal care staff released the trap from its foot, they got to work giving it an exam and determining the extent of its injuries. The tissue around one digit was past the point of recovery: the tissue was necrotic and the toe was hanging off. Our veterinarian anesthetized the crow and surgically amputated, sutured, and dressed the toe. The crow was also found to have parasites, so it was quarantined and treated accordingly. To manage the pain of the amputation and prevent infection, pain medication and antibiotics were also prescribed. After two months in our care, this healthy American Crow was released back into the wild.

This thin juvenile female **Virginia Opossum** came to us stuck on a glue trap, completely covered in extremely tacky glue. After receiving over five baths with a special solution over a six day period, she was finally no longer sticky. She stayed in our care for 19 days to gain strength and put on a little weight before she was returned to the wild. Please consider not using glue traps! There are humane alternatives that do not require injuring or killing the intended rodent and unintended wildlife.

This is one of six **Western Pond Turtles** admitted this year, which is a record number for us. This turtle came to us with an injury to its tail from an unknown cause. We decided to amputate the necrotic tip of its tail. After amputation, this turtle recovered in homecare so it could be in a less stressful environment and get individualized care. Almost three months after intake, this Western Pond Turtle was released back into its natural habitat.

This **Western Screech Owl** was brought to us after it was hit by a car. As a result the accident, this adult owl suffered from a severe eye injury: its left eye was filled with blood and mouth and beak were damaged in the collision. This was a very guarded case, because the severity of the bird’s injury. Luckily, with time and eye medication, the owl slowly improved. The eye returned back to its normal color, and careful observation in an outdoor enclosure revealed that the owl’s ability to fly, change directions, and avoid obstacles were unchanged. Although its eye may never look the same again, this owl proved to be a great live hunter and will live a healthy life back out in the wild (85 days in care).
To purchase tickets, please call WCSV at (408) 929-9453, Monday - Friday, 9:00 am - 5:00 pm. Tickets are $150 per person in advance and $175 at the door (space permitting) and a table for 10 is $1250.

Join us for our annual fundraiser, Wingin’ It for Wildlife, held this year on August 31st at the Winchester Mystery House from 4:30 pm - 8:00 pm. Guests will be served fine food and local wine, and we will have a silent and live auction in addition to an owl release (pending availability).
Who's Who at WCSV? A Species Identification Game

Match the animal photo on the right to the common name below.

___ 1. Western Tanager
___ 2. Anna’s Hummingbird
___ 3. Gray Fox
___ 4. Great Horned Owl
___ 5. Saw-whet Owl
___ 6. Coyote
___ 7. Western Gull
___ 8. American Crow
___ 9. Eastern Gray Squirrel
___ 10. Common Poorwill
___ 11. Double-crested Cormorant
___ 12. California Ground Squirrel(s)

Answers: 1e, 2g, 3d, 4b, 5l, 6i, 7j, 8f, 9c, 10k, 11h, 12a
Thank You! 

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