Before long we’ll be in the midst of our busiest time of the year for animals, which can start as early as March and last through early October. Every winter the Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley prepares for this period when we treat thousands of sick, injured and orphaned wild animals found throughout Santa Clara County and this winter is no exception.

Because of your generosity, we have been able to make crucial improvements for the animals big and small — that greatly benefit them on their road to recovery.

Currently, we have several large projects underway. One is the updating of our raptor and coyote enclosures. As you might imagine, these structures experience a lot of wear and tear, so this maintenance is essential. We’ve added new perches for the raptors and will enhance the dens for our coyotes to help with their journey towards a wild life.

Our smaller patients are also getting big upgrades, including handmade hummingbird feeders and more stable metal perches for our doves and pigeons. Additionally, we are focusing on enrichment to hone our patients’ natural abilities that will make them successful upon release. Our opossums and squirrels receive hammocks that offer them a less stressful place to recuperate, which can accelerate their rehabilitation process. We provide our skunks with boxes that teach them to find hidden food, and made a rope swing decorated with feathers to encourage our bobcat kittens’ hunting ability and dexterity. They even got a Christmas tree this year so they could practice foraging and camouflaging themselves.

We couldn’t do any of these vital things for the patients in our care without you. I want to thank you all for your ongoing support of WCSV and our mission to rehabilitate and release local wildlife. Every donation is meaningful and none too small. There are also other ways to help WCSV 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
- Household Supply Donations

With gratitude,

Laura Hawkins, Executive Director

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 the 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. Let’s follow the tracks, wherever we may find them, and leave our own for those who may follow.
CSV is having its one and only annual fundraiser, “Wingin’ it for Wildlife”, on Saturday, August 31st from 4:30–8:00 pm at the Winchester Mystery House in San Jose. Come out and support local wildlife by enjoying good food and wine, a silent and live auction, and pending availability, a release of an owl. Mingle with other wildlife enthusiasts at this intriguing and historic location. More details to come.

Get Your Backyard Ready for Birds!

Do you have a bird feeder or bird bath? Get ready for songbirds to return by properly cleaning your bird feeders and baths.

**Bird Feeder Cleaning**

½ Hot Water and ½ White Vinegar.

White vinegar is the best non-toxic cleaner to use on bird feeders.

1. Remove all moldy seed
2. Take apart the feeder as best you can
3. Clean the feeder with the hot water and white vinegar solution
4. Let dry and reassemble feeder

**Bird Bath Cleaning**

Keep all bird baths free from mosquito larvae and algae with regular cleaning. If you begin to notice algae growing, clean the bath with ‘Superbac’ bird bath scrub or white vinegar and a few drops of ‘Fountec’.

If you are having trouble cleaning your bird feeder, or don’t have enough time, you can bring them to Los Gatos Birdwatcher, located at 792 Blossom Hill Road Los Gatos, CA 95032, for a free cleaning on Tuesdays and Thursdays. They do ask that for this free service, you donate to one of the local charities they partner with. We are one of those non-profit partners. Look for the Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley’s donation box! For more information visit http://www.losgatosbirdwatcher.com/
In the span of about three months, WCSV admitted 20 Snowy Egrets, 16 of which came from a local correctional facility. Most of these Snowy Egrets were brought to us by concerned staff when they noticed these water birds orphaned and stranded within the fenced in property. Did you know that these adult waterbirds experience a change in color of their feet during the breeding season? They have greenish-yellow feet for most of the year (see photo above) but once breeding season commences, their feet turn orange-yellow in color.

This little Dusky-footed Woodrat was found orphaned in Sunnyvale. This little guy was only about two weeks old and still had its eyes closed. During initial examination, we found superficial scratches on its stomach and right arm. We cleaned its wounds and gave the woodrat fluids, pain medications and antibiotics before being sent to one of our homecare volunteers. Most of our rodent patients are sent to an off-site volunteer so that they have one-on-one care in a less stressful environment. Woodrats are commonly called “trade rats” because when they find new treasure, they drop whatever they are carrying to pick up this new item, hence the term “trade”.

In late May we received six nestling Common Barn Owls from Milpitas after they were found cold and lethargic under a tree. When owlets are found under a tree, it typically means that they fell out of the nest, or something happened to their nest so it is necessary to intervene. As you can see in these photos, some of the nestlings look larger than the others. This is because Barn Owls hatch at different times, depending on when the eggs were laid. This is called “asynchronous” hatching. The age difference between the youngest and oldest nestlings can be up to three weeks apart! Our owl specialists, who monitor numerous owl boxes in the area, identified two nest boxes with babies similarly aged as these so they could be “renested”. Barn Owls will adopt orphaned nestlings and care for them as their own. Because mom knows best, it is ideal to find adult Barn Owls to “adopt” orphaned nestlings and care for them as their own. All six owlets were successfully renested and adopted by adult Barn Owls.

In early December, a concerned park-goer came by to alert us that a duck was hanging by a tree next to the Penitencia Creek Park pond (right outside of our facility!). A team of WCSV staff members went out to assess the situation. This Mallard was caught on a string that was positioned between two trees. We secured the duck and cut off the string. After letting the duck relax, animal care staff removed the tangled string from its wing. The string was only wrapped around a few primary feathers but after removal, she had possible soft-tissue injury, and was given supportive care. After a few days in our care, this Mallard was transferred to another facility that specializes in waterbird care.
This juvenile **Red-shouldered Hawk** came into our care in July 2018. Its flight feathers were in bad condition: they were so tattered and broken that the hawk could not fly properly. Birds naturally lose their old feathers and grow new ones a couple times a year, a process called “molting,” but we didn’t want to wait that long to release this otherwise healthy bird. In situations like this, we can perform a procedure called “imping”, short for feather implantation. Just as we would get hair extensions or acrylic nails, we can implant unbroken feathers in birds that have missing or injured feathers. Working with rehabilitators at Lindsay Wildlife Experience, our wildlife technicians implanted a total of 20 new feathers on this hawk—a procedure which required anesthesia and hours of feather preparation. But our hard work paid off, because after one week of careful monitoring to ensure the feathers stayed in place, this hawk was released back into the wild to fly free!

We suspect that this **Northern Flicker** flew into a window because of the injuries it was admitted with. During examination, animal care staff discovered that there was blood in its mouth and the tip of its beak was slightly broken. A few days after intake, our veterinarian filed its broken beak tips smooth, a process called “coping”, and started it on supplements to speed up beak growth and repair. Our veterinarian also determined that this Northern Flicker was a hybrid. There are two types of Northern Flickers: red shafted and yellow shafted. As you can see in these photos, this bird exhibits both red and yellow shafted characteristics, indicating that this Northern Flicker is actually a hybrid of the two.

This **Striped Skunk** was stuck at the bottom of a 50 foot manhole. A trap was lowered down by the County Park Department into the manhole on a Friday and was checked each day that followed. On Monday, Silicon Valley Animal Care Authority had pulled up the trap and the skunk was inside! The officer tried to release this skunk but he had gotten tangled up in the rope that was used to lower the trap into the hole. After being brought to WCSV, our animal care technicians untangled the skunk and set him up to rest, eat and drink while he heals from superficial wounds and a sunken eye.

This **Virginia Opossum** came to us from San Jose after being found caught in garden netting. After untangling this patient, we determined that although mildly dehydrated and thin, the injuries were superficial. This opossum was treated for fleas and given subcutaneous fluids then set up in our hospital to rest and recover. After only 12 days, this young animal was released back into the wild.
The skunk featured on the front cover is a baby striped skunk, one of four that were admitted to our facility independently and for the reasons below:

**Record # 2197**

*Reason For Admission:* Appeared to be a blind, orphaned juvenile.

*Initial Examination Findings:* Infections in both eyes, causing them to be crusted shut.

*Treatment Plan:* Topical ophthalmic antibiotic. Once eyes clear, set up with conspecifics to strengthen their normal species-specific behaviors.

**Record # 2235**

*Reason For Admission:* Caught and attacked by a dog, orphaned juvenile.

*Initial Examination Findings:* Emaciated, dehydrated, covered in fleas.

*Treatment Plan:* Fluids, flea treatment and vaccinations. Once free from fleas, set up with conspecifics to strengthen normal species-specific behaviors.

**Record # 2387**

*Reason For Admission:* Orphaned, unable to stand. Possible leg fracture.

*Initial Examination Findings:* No fractures were palpated. Emaciated, dehydrated and covered in fleas.

*Treatment Plan:* Fluids, flea treatment and vaccinations. Once free from fleas and dewormed, set up with conspecifics to strengthen normal species-specific behaviors.

**Record # 2616**

*Reason For Admission:* Orphaned and alone.

*Initial Examination Findings:* Emaciated, dehydrated and fleas.

*Treatment Plan:* Fluids, vaccines, deworming and a flea treatment upon arrival then set up inside with food and water. Once eating well, set up with conspecifics to strengthen normal species-specific behaviors.

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**Release**

These four were released on August 9th in San Jose in a secluded, natural area. Only three of the four striped skunks are pictured below as one darted out of the kennel much quicker than the others.

**Skunk Natural History**

Skunks, also called polecats, are black and white mammals that use specialized scent glands to release a toxic odor in defense. The most common skunk found in California, and most of the United States, is the Striped Skunk. The Striped Skunk is all black except for a white ‘V’ down their back and a white stripe between their eyes. Skunks are crepuscular, which means they are active during twilight, just before dawn and right after dusk. The average lifespan of a wild skunk is two to four years. They rarely travel more than two miles from their dens, so they typically pick a den location that is within two miles of a water source. Skunks are opportunistic eaters and adapt their diet according to the seasons. They are also nature’s pest control, eating rodents, frogs, worms, eggs, venomous snakes, beetles, wasps, and other insects.

**Defense Mechanism**

Most wild animals keep a respectful distance from skunks, and because skunks have poor eyesight, they don’t always run from a perceived threat. Skunks do not immediately spray either: they actually go through a series of behaviors to deter the perceived threat prior to spraying. Striped skunks will face the threat head on and stomp their front paws, sometimes even charging forward a few feet before jumping backward. Spotted skunks, a skunk species located in the eastern United States, will perform a handstand and approach the threat. This handstand is used to trick predators into thinking that the skunk is larger and more dangerous. It also serves as a warning that if the predator does not retreat, the skunk will spray. When a skunk is being hunted by a predator but cannot see the threat, they release their spray as a cloud so that the predator must run through it. When the skunk has a target to focus on, their spray is released as a stream. This stream is directed at the predator and the skunk can accurately spray a target up to 10 feet away. It’s important to note that they use this defense sparingly because they run out of spray after six consecutive uses and then remain vulnerable and defenseless for up to 10 days while their body regenerates the spray.
**Skunk Behavior & Reproduction**

Skunks remain solitary except during the winter, when they have communal dens to stay warm. During breeding season, the female drives the male away after mating and raises the litter of two to 12 offspring by herself. Kits are typically born between the end of April through early June. When mom has her kits to feed, she may venture out during the day to search for food before nightfall. Night is the most dangerous time for the kits in the den so mom stays with them all night for protection. Because mother skunk raises her young alone, she teaches them discipline at an early age. When mom and her kits leave the den, her kits walk behind her in single fashion, one by one so that she can better protect them. The kits produce musk at eight days old but cannot spray a threat until about three weeks old. They will finally leave their mom at one year old, when they reach sexual maturity.

**Coexisting with Skunks: Humane Deterrents**

Skunks are adaptable and have a very flexible diet so pet food left out for cats and dogs offer plentiful and tasty meals for unexpected skunk visitors. Decks, garages, basements, and wood piles provide adequate housing. These often cause conflicts with homeowners. To avoid skunks as tenants, bring in any pet food at night, secure vent screens to your house and close off raised decks. Skunks are not good climbers, so you can easily keep them out of a fenced-in yard. If you suspect you already have a skunk in your residence, you will need to determine if there are any dependent young and that the skunk isn’t trapped inside before wildlife proofing the area. To encourage them to leave on their own, use a hot pepper spray and/or place containers with ammonia soaked rags around the opening. Skunks are good diggers, so put any barrier well below the surface (at least six inches) and bent outward so the skunk will not be able to dig back underneath.

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**Wildlife Rehabilitation Vocabulary**

- **Conspecifics**: a member of the same species
- **Crepuscular**: active during twilight, just before dawn and right after dusk
- **Dehydrated**: to lose a large amount of water
- **Dewormed**: to treat an animal to get rid of harmful worms
- **Emaciated**: abnormally thin or weak, especially because of illness or a lack of food
- **Ophthalmic**: relating to the eye and its diseases
- **Palpated**: examine (a part of the body) by touch for medical purposes and diagnosis
**Do’s For Springtime**

- Regularly clean bird feeders and birdbaths.
- Use snap traps for pest control or an owl box for natural pest control.
- Postpone tree-trimming until the fall. Always check for nests prior to trimming bushes and trees.
- Maintain a safe distance when observing wildlife.
- If you touch a baby bird, you **CAN** put it back in the nest. It is a **MYTH** that mother birds will reject the baby after being touched by a human. Although birds’ sense of smell is not well understood, it is clear that they won’t abandon babies that have been touched by a human.
- Make a make-shift nest for orphaned baby birds if you cannot find the nest or it’s been destroyed.

**Don’ts For Springtime**

- **NEVER** feed wildlife.
- **NEVER** keep a wild animal as a pet.
- **NEVER** use rodenticide poisoning or sticky traps for pest control.
- **DON’T** intervene with ducklings and their mom, if you chase the mom away (even on accident), she won’t return.
- **DON’T** relocate **ANY** wild animal. It is **ILLEGAL** to relocate wildlife in California. When you move a wild animal to a new location, they may have competition, predators, and lack of knowledge of where food and water is located, making it extremely challenging to survive.

*All illustrations by Karan Gathani*
In Nature, Mother Always Knows Best!

Every year, many kind hearted and well-intentioned members of our community bring us young, healthy animals that would have been better off left alone. We call this an over-rescue. To teach her young how to fly, mother birds will push their offspring out of the nest, a process known as fledging. In many cases, for both birds and mammals, their mother is close by gathering food, or hiding because she senses a threat. That is why sometimes the best thing to do is simply let her come back and take over, as she can provide the absolute best care for her young.

I found a baby bird on the ground, does it need help?

1. Is it visibly injured? Bleeding? Was it attacked by an animal?
   - Yes: Contact WCSV 408-929-9453
   - No: What does it look like?

2. Eyes not open
   - You found a Hatchling. It’s very young

3. Eyes Open, some feathers
   - Feathered; hops or flutters
   - You found a Fledgling
   - Is it safe from people and pets?
     - Yes: Great! The baby is fine; you can now leave the area.
     - No: Gently put the baby in a nearby bush or tree

4. Can you see the nest?
   - Yes: Return the bird to the nest
   - No: Make a nest from a basket and dried grass, or use pieces from the old nest. Place it in a nearby tree

5. Does the baby seem untended?
   - No: Return the bird to the nest
   - Yes: Great! The baby is fine; you can now leave the area.

Contact WCSV 408-929-9453

Bird drawings by Julie Zickefoose
**Local Native Songbirds Matching Game**

Match the photo of the songbird on the right to its common name on the left.

- 1. Lesser Goldfinch
- 2. Chestnut Backed Chickadee
- 3. California Scrub Jay
- 4. California Towhee
- 5. House Finch
- 6. Cedar Waxwing
- 7. Black Phoebe
- 8. House Sparrow
- 9. Oak Titmouse
- 10. Bushtit
- 11. American Robin
- 12. Yellow Rumped Warbler

*Answers: 1F, 2E, 3B, 4I, 5A, 6L, 7C, 8J, 9D, 10H, 11G, 12K*

*Photos: allaboutbirds.org*
**Release Highlights**

This **Virginia Opossum** was featured in our end of year appeal. This adult male opossum was brought to WCSV after being found stuck hanging from a fence. Although no fractures were found, this guy did have massive lesions on its skin, one spanning 15 cm from its shoulder all the way down to its left hip. He was also dragging his left hind leg. After sutures, glue, advanced healing applications and 76 days in care, this opossum was released back to his home.

This **California Scrub Jay** was admitted into our hospital after getting stuck to a glue trap. This adult bird had walked across the trap and could not get out. Luckily, only its feet were stuck and had remnants of the glue substance on them. Our animal care staff went to work using a special solution to remove the glue. After removing all the glue, this California Scrub Jay was tested to make sure it could fly and released the same day! This was a quick turn-around but some patients can be released sooner than others depending on their injury and condition.

In April 2018, the Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care received an infant female **Coyote**. Because WCSV specializes in predatory mammal rehabilitation, the decision was made to transfer her to our facility. It is well known in wildlife rehab that it is difficult to raise infant predatory mammals (typically bobcats and coyotes) without conspecifics. Lucky for us, we had another coyote similar in age and size so that this new orphan would not be alone. This girl was in our care for over 200 days, which is required to ensure that the animal is self-sufficient, wild, and able to thrive on its own. She was released back in Tahoe where she was originally found, to live a wild, healthy life. The cost for food and medical treatments (such as vaccinations) for this one coyote during its duration at WCSV was approximately $6,000!

By the time you are reading this edition of Tracks, this **Bobcat** will have been released. This male bobcat came to us as an orphaned juvenile from a wildlife organization in Santa Cruz and was transferred to us because of our experience with bobcats. He has been in our care for 186 days, learning how to live hunt and behave as a wild cat. He is a feisty one and we can’t wait for him to thrive in the wild!
If you see a wild animal in distress, find helpful information at wcsv.org
(408) 929-9453

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