Myths About Our Wild Neighbors

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**Directors’ Message**

**Dear Wildlife Supporters:**
As we come to the end of another year, I gratefully reflect on what has happened at WCSV in the past 12 months. If I had to sum up what the year was about, it was about partnership; the partnership with you, our donors, and the community at large.

As the only wildlife rehabilitation center serving Santa Clara County, we are responsible for treating all wildlife from the area, which is something we do with pride. We had no idea at the beginning of the year that we would be taking in 7,000 wild patients at our small center. This was a significant increase from the 6,200 animals we received in 2020.

However, even with this increase of patients, we are still able to give them all exceptional care despite our small staff and aging facility. This is where the partnership comes in. It is because of you, who have generously supported us, that we have been able to make much needed improvements, from expanding and updating our old enclosures, to upgrading our hospital equipment which all helps these animals have a second chance at living a wild life.

What we bring to the table in this partnership is the information you need to assist local wildlife. We hope you find this issue informative as we dispel myths about our wild neighbors, talk about what to do and what not to do when you find wildlife, and profile patients that have been released.

All of us at WCSV are especially grateful for your generosity at this time, as the pandemic, supply chain issues, and influx of animals has caused expenses to skyrocket. We could not do without all of you. 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. Here are some suggestions:

- **Monthly Giving Schedule:** Set up a monthly giving schedule through PayPal. Once you set it up, you don’t have to think about it again, and the Center will benefit from your contribution year-round.

- **Employer Matching Program:** This is a fantastic way to see your gift doubled. See if your employer has a matching gift program.

- **Bequests or Living Trust:** A bequest or a gift through a living trust is another great way to contribute to WCSV.

- **Amazon Smile:** You can donate to the Center when you shop on amazon.com. The AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the sale price from your eligible purchases to WCSV. To register, go to smile.amazon.com, and select us as the benefiting charity. Every little bit helps!

- **Amazon Wish List:** If you wish to buy a specific item that we need, try our wish list. To find it, go to wcsv.org/wishlist, and you will be automatically redirected to Amazon.

- **Vehicle Donations:** Consider donating that old vehicle to V-DAC (Vehicle Donation to Any Charity) as a way to help our local wildlife. Their programs turn any car, truck, boat, or RV into cash and deliver a high percent of net proceeds to non-profits like WCSV. Visit their website to learn more about how to donate a vehicle to help WCSV at www.v-dac.com.

We are humbled by your generosity always, and especially in these trying times. Thank you for your support and for your devotion to our mission to rehabilitate and release wildlife in need. We truly appreciate you being a member of the WCSV team and an invaluable part of the work that we do.

With gratitude,

Laura Hawkins, Executive Director

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**Tracks**

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.
How You Can Help When You Find A Wild Animal

In this issue, we’ll go over why relocating animals doesn’t have the desired effect, some facts about common wild neighbors—the Virginia opossum, foxes, squirrels, and snakes—and why we tell everyone not to feed the animals that they’ve found.

Here’s what to do when you find injured, orphaned, or sick wildlife during the day:

• Call us for advice: (408) 929-9453
• If safe to handle:
  » Put on heavy gloves and place the animal in a ventilated container
  » Bring the animal to WCSV during business hours: 9 am to 3 pm
• If unsafe to handle, please call your local animal control for assistance.

If you find an animal when we are closed, please keep the animal overnight in a warm and quiet place indoors, and bring it to WCSV during business hours. If you are unable to keep the animal overnight, contact your local animal control for assistance.

• Do not leave animals at our gate! They will not survive:
  » Sick, injured, or orphaned animals often die due to the cold
  » Predators break into the boxes and kill the animal inside
  » Animals left behind often escape and then we cannot help them

Please follow the flow chart found on our website, reproduced at right.
Please Don't Feed the Animals

Here's why: wildlife has very specific dietary and nutritional requirements. While they enjoy human food—discarded, or deliberately given to them—it is very bad for their health.

Squirrels & Opossums

The internet often recommends puppy milk as food for orphaned squirrels and opossums. This information is incorrect, yet is frequently repeated online. Puppy milk causes extreme digestive issues, which starts with diarrhea and can lead to the death of the baby animal. It is extremely easy for a young squirrel to aspirate—inhalate fluid into its lungs—which can lead to pneumonia and the squirrel expiring. Baby squirrels that have fallen out of trees may have aspirated blood from the fall, and feeding them at home before being examined by a wildlife rehabilitation professional can result in the squirrel drowning if they have aspirated a combination of blood and puppy milk.

Ducks & Geese

These birds enjoy the taste of bread, which unfortunately has zero nutritional value for these waterbirds. The bread also swells up when wet and makes the birds feel full, causing them to stop foraging for their natural diet. They develop metabolic bone disease due to insufficient calcium; their bones become malformed and incredibly susceptible to breakage. This prevents the birds from flying and causes extreme pain and weakness. There is no effective way to reverse this, so we cannot rehabilitate those with this condition.

Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds, especially the babies, cannot survive on any store-bought nectar or homemade sugar mixes as they do not contain the necessary fat, protein and salts. Nectar is only 16.5% of an adult hummingbird's diet, and even less of a nestling’s. Well-meaning members of the public often end up covering nestlings in dried nectar while attempting to feed them. If you find a hummingbird in need of assistance, please bring it to your nearest wildlife rehabilitator so trained professionals with proper equipment can provide the best care possible.

Thank You! A Special Thanks to Our Invaluable Partners in Service

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- Sigrid Roemer
- Silicon Valley Animal Control Authority
- Silicon Valley Community Foundation
- SPCA for Monterey County
- Stanford Redwood City
- Summerlee Foundation
- Sunil Mohan
- The Borch Foundation
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**Trapping Doesn't Work**

Trapping and relocating wildlife is illegal in the state of California, and carries a hefty fine.

Relocating animals is ineffective, as another animal will move into the void that has been created. You may find yourself dealing with a potentially worse problem from the new critter.

Various pest and critter control companies advertise that they trap and relocate wildlife, but they are subject to the same rules and regulations as everyone else. Per California Code of Regulations, any trapped “nuisance” animals must be euthanized if they are not immediately released on-site. They cannot be taken anywhere else, and the companies advertising relocation actually euthanize the animals instead.

Addressing the root cause of why animals are living in your yard is the most effective way to get them to leave. You may be unwittingly providing them with shelter (open decks, wood piles, or other stacked items) or food (fallen fruit, pet food left out). Removing incentives for wildlife to remain in your yard will encourage them to move on. Please don't hesitate to call us (408) 929-9453 if you need additional information on resources available to help you with this.

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**Myths About Our Wild Neighbors**

**True or False?**

- Virginia opossums are great diggers. **False:** they are opportunistic and take advantage of holes created by other animals, such as raccoons or skunks.

- Virginia opossums cannot carry rabies. **True:** their body temperature is too low for the rabies virus to survive.

- Gray foxes are bold and have little fear of people. **False:** Gray foxes are reclusive, and prefer to avoid humans and domestic animals.

- Striped skunks eat fruit off the branches of trees. **False:** they are poor climbers and are not the culprits.

- Rattlesnakes are the only native venomous snake in the Bay Area. **True:** all other snakes that you may find sunning themselves do not pose a great danger to humans.

- Coyotes typically live in one place. **False:** they are nomadic, and their strong legs allow them to cover up to sixty miles in one night.

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**Coyote**—At the end of April, this male coyote came in as an orphaned pup. He spent a month indoors, first consuming soft foods before quickly graduating to solids. Once he received all of his vaccinations, staff moved the animal outside to socialize with other coyotes in care, and to learn all the skills he needs to live free in the wild. After spending five months at the Center, he could run, jump, dig, and hunt with the best of them. Staff released him on a beautiful hillside near where he was found. The coyote calmly took in his surroundings before disappearing over the hill.

These canines are nomadic and tend to travel and hunt alone, though they do organize into larger packs led by a dominant breeding pair. In general, they prefer to avoid humans, but will take the opportunity to scavenge food left out or prey on smaller pets left outside at night.

**Western Tanager**—This rare patient, a Western tanager, came in after hitting a window in San Jose. It was bleeding from the left eye, and our technician quickly cleaned the bird’s face and applied topical anti-inflammatory around the eye. Our veterinarian was able to determine that the tanager had avoided major injury. After six days in care, the swelling around the eye resolved, and he flew well when flight-tested. It then was returned to the wild.

Western tanagers are found in our local woods during the summer, and will also venture into suburban areas to consume fresh fruit from fruit trees. In 28 years, our Center has only received 17 of these uncommon birds.

**Western Screech Owl**—In early August, a concerned neighbor found this Western screech owl stuck on a glue trap outside of his garage. This poor owl was probably trying to eat bugs off the trap when it got stuck. Our animal care technicians carefully removed the glue from the owl with a gentle solvent, and then washed it several times. After two weeks, the owl was ready to fly again, and was returned to the wild.

We do not recommend the use of adhesive glue traps; instead of solving an insect problem, they catch animals trying to eat insects stuck to the trap. These animals often do not survive unless they receive treatment quickly. Never remove an animal stuck to a glue trap! Bring it to our Center immediately, or call your local animal control for assistance.

**Sharp-shinned Hawk**—This feisty sharp-shinned hawk came into the Center in mid-November after hitting a window in San Jose. The bird was still flighted but perched unsteadily, so staff prescribed anti-inflammatories and set up the patient to recover quietly in our isolation area. After about a week, the hawk perched perfectly and flew well in our outdoor flight enclosures, and was returned back to his natural habitat.

Sharp-shinned hawks are the smallest hawks in North America—even adult crows are larger. These raptors resemble Cooper’s Hawks, but have flat-tipped instead of rounded tails, and smaller, more-rounded heads.
**Fox Sparrow**—This cat-caught fox sparrow came to us from Saratoga in October. We rarely receive fox sparrows, and have only ever taken in 13 of them. During the initial exam, staff noticed that a significant amount of the primary feathers on the left wing were missing, as were many of the secondary feathers on both wings. We prescribed antibiotics and anti-inflammatories, and set the patient up to begin the long process of growing its feathers back. This ultimately took an entire month, after which the sparrow was released to fly free again. Fox sparrows migrate up and down the West Coast as the seasons change, eating a variety of insects and even crustaceans, and are usually only found in the Bay Area during the fall and winter.

![Fox Sparrow](image)

**Virginia Opossum**—This young adult male Virginia opossum came in with a wound on his snout and was suffering from a severe respiratory infection, as evidenced by a yellow discharge coming out of its nose. Technicians cleaned the torn nostril and prescribed both antibiotics and anti-inflammatories. The opossum faced a long road in its recovery, but our staff was up to the challenge. His breathing remained congested for a little over two weeks before the nasal discharge cleared up, and his wound healed completely. Once the congestion was completely clear, our volunteers released the opossum back to his natural habitat.

When a wild animal is sick or injured, it is imperative that the animal gets to the hospital as soon as possible to maximize the chances of treating them successfully. An infection such as the one afflicting this opossum could have been fatal had he not been found in time.

![Virginia Opossum](image)

**Turkeys**—During the summer, we received eight orphaned wild turkeys from Gilroy. Raised together for months in our outdoor enclosures, these turkeys spent the season learning to fly and forage for food as they would in the wild. Once they reached the proper age, a staff member located the original flock the majority of the turkeys had been separated from. She was able to successfully reunite the orphans with them; the adult turkeys happily welcomed both the lost birds and the newcomers.

Wild turkeys are most often seen foraging on the ground, but are strong flyers and roost high up in the trees at night. Their flocks have separate hierarchies for males and females; the female pecking order tends to stay static once established, while the males constantly compete for dominance.
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Visit wcsv.org/wishlist

Here are a few ideas

Exam gloves
S, M, L, XL, XXL

Cleaning materials

Animal food

Can’t decide? Purchase an Amazon Gift Card