



Important Guidelines

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Guidelines for the Public in Handling Sick, Injured or Orphaned Native Wildlife

General Guidelines

We do not recommend members of the public handle wild animals. However, if you must confine an injured or orphaned animal:

- Wear gloves and protective eyewear. Heavy leather gloves are necessary for handling mammals or large birds; eyewear is most important with birds of prey and shorebirds with long pointy beaks.
- Wash your hands immediately before and after handling the animal.
- Do not give the animal any food or water (except hummingbirds—see below).
- Line an escape proof, ventilated box with unfrayed towels or a soft cloth. Place the animal in the box, cover the container with a light sheet or towel, and put it in a warm, dark, quiet place away from pets and children until you can get it to a wildlife center (no talking or car radios!).
- If it is cold out or the animal is chilled, wrap a hot water bottle in a towel and place it inside the container next to the animal.

Common Situations

Baby Birds

Touching a baby bird will not cause its parents to reject it.

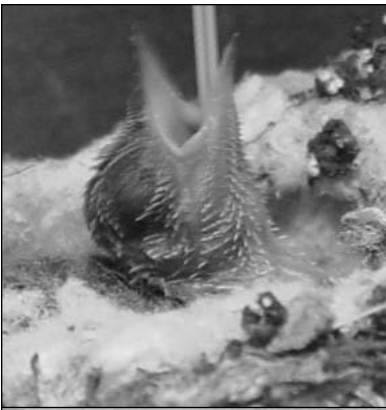
- If the bird is hurt or sick (unable to flutter wings, drooping unevenly, shivering, bleeding, or attacked by a cat or dog), follow the General Guidelines above for assisting injured or orphaned wildlife.
- If the bird is uninjured and is a nestling (no feathers, only soft down or quills), place it back in the nest, or in a small container lined with cloth and place it back in the tree.
- If the bird is uninjured and is a fledgling (has feathers and a short tail), and is not in immediate danger, then leave it alone. If it is in danger from cats, dogs or people, place the fledgling in nearby bushes or a tree limb, and watch from a distance. If the parents are nearby, leave the area. If not, or if the fledgling still appears in danger from pets or people, contact your local wildlife center.

Seal Pups and Fawns

- Mothers normally leave their babies for hours at a time to forage and feed, so the animal is probably not an orphan.
- If the baby looks cold, hungry, diseased or confused, or if dogs, other animals, people or automobiles threaten its safety, call your local wildlife center or park ranger.
- If the baby does not appear injured or sick and is not in immediate danger, then leave the area. The mother will not return if people or pets are present.

Trapped Animals

- Open a door or window to the outside and close off any doors to other rooms.
- Leave the animal alone in the dark and quiet, and it will probably find its way out.
- If a bird is trapped, turn off all lights and open all windows and doors. Draw blinds on closed windows, so the bird is not attracted to the light causing it to fly into the glass.



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Dead animals in roads or yards

Contact the Los Angeles City Sanitation Department to pick up dead animals (800-773-2489), or contact your local animal control office.

Dead Oiled Wildlife

Contact your local wildlife center if you find a dead, oiled wildlife. A volunteer will be dispatched to collect the carcass according to special procedures.

Land Mammals

Bats

Bats are useful for keeping mosquito and other insect populations in check, but one in ten downed bats is rabid. Therefore, **never** handle a bat. If you find a bat and it appears to be sick, do not touch it. Contact your local animal control officer for assistance. If you must move it, wear heavy leather gloves and cover any exposed skin. If you are bitten, save the animal for examination, wash the wound immediately with soap and water, and see your doctor right away.

If a bat is roosting on a wall or tree, it is fine. Leave it alone. If a bat has fallen from its roost, it may be torpid and need 20 minutes or so to wake up and fly off. Leave it alone.

You can find out about dealing with wildlife nuisances or encouraging beneficial wild animals to pass by your home in our living with wildlife section.

Bobcats

The bobcat is one of two species of lynx found in North America. They weigh 15 to 35 pounds, are larger than domestic cats and have a short, black-tipped tail. Their ears have long black tufts of fur at the tips. Bobcats prey upon rodents, rabbits, carrion and insects and are therefore useful to landowners. Bobcats can inflict serious bites, however, and should not be handled by the untrained public. If you find one injured, contact your local wildlife center for assistance.

To avoid problems with bobcats:

- *Do not feed pets outdoors. If you must feed outdoors, clear away food bowls immediately.*
- *Do not leave food out at night.*
- *Ensure that any pets that could be considered prey (rabbits, etc.) are securely housed.*

Coyotes

Coyotes are members of the dog family and weigh between 20 and 50 pounds. They are gray, brown or tan above and whitish underneath. Coyotes eat garbage, insects, rodents, rabbits, birds, deer, fruits and berries. They are normally solitary hunters and are important to controlling rodent populations.

If you find an injured coyote, contact your local wildlife center for assistance. Coyotes can inflict serious bites and should not be handled by the untrained public.

To avoid problems with coyotes:

- *Do not feed pets outdoors. If you must feed outdoors, clear away food bowls immediately.*
- *Do not leave food out at night.*
- *Keep pets indoors when coyotes are seen or heard; coyotes are most active at dawn and dusk.*
- *Do not feed coyotes.*
- *Use noise to discourage them.*

Deer

Fawns

A mother deer is very attentive, however, it is normal for her to leave a young fawn alone for large portions of the day while she forages for food. The fawn settles down and waits for her. A healthy fawn may be reluctant to move and be curled up in a "don't notice me position." This is normal. Do not remove a healthy fawn from its location.

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If you find a fawn, here are a few things you can do:

- If the fawn appears healthy but is curled up in a poor location and in immediate danger from cars or dogs, for instance, move the animal into nearby brush up to 50 feet from where it was found (older fawns may run away.) Check back in a few hours and see if the animal is still there. If so, and the animal appears distressed, contact your local wildlife center for assistance.
- If the baby looks injured, cold, hungry, diseased or confused, or if dogs, other animals, people or automobiles threaten its safety, call your local wildlife center or park ranger. Do not feed the animal. If you are transporting the animal to a wildlife center, place the fawn in a dog carrier or cardboard box lined with a towel. Cover the carrier with a sheet or towel for transport. Keep it warm and quiet (no radios or talking while driving!).

Adult deer

If you find an injured adult deer, stay clear of the animal. Adult deer are very dangerous and have the potential to seriously hurt or kill good Samaritans. Petting and stroking an injured adult deer can kill the animal from stress. They do not find it comforting. Contact your local animal control officer or a wildlife center for assistance. If the deer is merely trapped in someone's yard, be patient. Deer can usually find their way out of any yard they find their way into. Do not chase the animal; it may panic and injure itself or anyone around it. Never approach an adult deer, especially if it is obviously panicky.

Opossums

Adult opossums that are injured can be placed in a box or pet carrier by grabbing the base of the tail while wearing heavy leather gloves. Avoid the head and mouth. Opossums are not typically aggressive. You can also use a shovel to gently scoop the animal into a box for transport.

If an opossum is killed, check the pouch. If there are babies in the pouch attached to the nipples, do not try to detach them. Bring the dead mom with the babies attached to your local wildlife center. Baby opossums swallow the nipple to help them stay in the pouch, so they are difficult to remove. If the babies are not attached, place them in a ventilated, towel-lined box with a hot water bottle for warmth and bring them to a wildlife center as soon as possible.

Rabbits

Abandoned baby rabbits

If you find healthy bunnies that are four to five inches long, able to hop, with eyes open and ears up, they do not need help. They are able to survive on their own. If you find a very small (three to four inches long) uninjured rabbit, put it back where you found it and leave it undisturbed for several hours. If the nest has been damaged, it can be repaired. Look for a shallow depression lined with grass. Place babies in nest with light layers of grass to hide them. Leave the area or the mother will not return. Mothers return only at dawn and dusk. The parents will likely come back and reclaim the "orphan." If the animal is injured or truly abandoned (mother seen dead, the nest is bulldozed, etc.), or if dogs, cats or people are a real threat, put the animal in a small, closed, ventilated box on a warm towel and keep it in a quiet area. Don't feed or handle the rabbit as it can die easily from stress. Bring the rabbit to a wildlife center as quickly and quietly as possible.

Injured adult rabbits

If you find an injured or sick rabbit (bloody nose, shivering, attacked by cat or dog), place the animal in an escape proof, ventilated box lined with a towel or soft cloth. Wear gloves and wash your hands before and after handling the animal. Cover the container with a light sheet or towel and place it in a warm, dark, quiet place until you can get the animal to a wildlife center. If the animal is chilled, place a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel in the container next to the animal. Note exactly where you found the animal. This will be important for its release.

Raccoons

The public should not handle raccoons. They can carry rabies as well as other dangerous zoonotic intestinal parasites and are very aggressive animals. Adult raccoons need sedation to be handled safely.

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Skunks

The public should not handle skunks. They can carry rabies and leptospirosis and are very aggressive animals. If you see a skunk during daylight hours, it is probably sick. Contact your local animal control officer for assistance. If you must handle a skunk, wear glasses or goggles. Skunks are very accurate at spraying into the eyes. Baby skunks are easier to handle prior to adolescence, but will spray if they are scared. If you find injured or orphaned baby skunks or raccoons, it is best to contact your local wildlife center immediately for assistance.

Squirrels

Baby squirrels fallen from nest

If the baby appears uninjured (no bloody nose, no wounds), and is warm to the touch, place it in a shallow, towel-lined box at the base of the tree and leave it undisturbed for four to six hours. Often, the mother will come down and carry off the baby. She will not come down if people or pets are nearby, so stay clear. If the baby is cool or cold, it should be warmed before placing out for reclaiming. Place a hot water bottle under the towel the baby is resting on. Humans handling the baby will not make the mother reject it. If the mother does not reclaim the baby within three hours, or by dark, bring the infant inside and keep it warm until it can be transported to a wildlife center. Injured baby squirrels should be brought in immediately.

Injured adult squirrels

If you find an injured or sick squirrel (bloody nose, shivering, attacked by cat or dog), place the animal in an escape proof, ventilated box lined with a towel or soft cloth. Wear gloves and wash your hands before and after handling the animal. Cover the container with a light sheet or towel and place it in a warm, dark, quiet place until you can get the animal to a wildlife center. If the animal is chilled, place a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel in the container next to the animal. Note exactly where you found the animal. This will be important for its release.

Birds

Baby and Fledging Birds

Contrary to the popular myth, touching a baby bird will not cause its parents to reject it. If you find an uninjured baby and the bird has no feathers, only soft down or quills, it has probably fallen from its nest. If you know where the nest is and can reach it, return the baby to the nest immediately. If the baby is cold to the touch, warm it first by placing it in a towel-lined box on a hot water bottle. Be careful. Overheating an animal can be just as harmful as letting it get cold. If necessary, a replacement nest can be made out of a small container, such as a shoebox or strawberry basket, and attached to the tree.

Fledging birds generally spend a few days on the ground learning to fly. If the bird has feathers and a short tail, is uninjured, and can stand or hop, it is a fledging bird that has fledged from the nest. Many songbirds go through this stage and spend time on the ground where their parents continue to feed them. If there is no danger in the area, they should be left alone. Watch the bird, hidden from sight, and see if the parent returns. They are not necessarily injured, and their parents are often nearby, feeding and keeping an eye on them. It is best to keep cats and dogs inside during this stage. If the bird appears to be in danger from cats, dogs or people, place the fledging in nearby bushes or a tree limb, and watch from a distance. If the parents are nearby, leave the area. If not, or if the fledging still appears in danger, contact your local wildlife center.

Injured Adult Birds

A bird that has hit a window and is injured should be monitored for two to four hours. If it has not recovered, it should be brought to a wildlife center for examination. To prevent birds from flying into windows, draw drapes or hang blinds to make windows more visible; put a bright light inside to cut down on glare; place a hawk silhouette in the window or place wind chimes or noise makers outside the window.

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A bird that has been attacked by a cat or dog must be brought to a wildlife center for treatment. Cats should be kept indoors or, at least, affix two large bells of varying shapes to their collar to warn off birds.

Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds are the **exception** to the rule about not feeding an injured animal. These little birds have such fast metabolisms that they need to be fed as soon as they are warmed. Use a simple solution of 4 parts warm water to 1 part sugar put into an eyedropper. The eyedropper is then placed over the bird's beak. The bird will extend its long tongue into the dropper to drink the formula. If the bird is very young and "gaping," place ONE drop of sugar water solution in the mouth. This procedure should be repeated every 30 minutes until the animal is in the hands of a licensed rehabilitator. (Which you will want to do fast as this is a tough feeding regime!) Take care not to get the sugar solution on the birds' feathers as it can damage them.

Marine Mammals

Sea Lions and Seals

Seals and sea lions naturally spend time on land resting, warming up and breeding. Do not approach a beached seal or sea lion. In spite of their cumbersome appearance they can move fast on land and inflict a vicious bite. They may also carry diseases. It is also a federal offense to alter their normal behavior. Please call 1-800-853-1964 to report anyone molesting a seal or sea lion.

- Do not pour water on an injured seal or sea lion. They often beach themselves to get dry or warm.
- Keep pets and children away from these animals.
- Report any thin, sick or injured animals to your local marine mammal rescue organization.

If you find a seal pup:

- Mothers normally leave their babies for hours at a time to feed, so the animal is probably not an orphan.
- If the baby looks cold, hungry, diseased or confused, or if dogs, other animals, or people threaten its safety, call your local wildlife center or park ranger.
- If the baby does not appear injured or sick and is not in immediate danger, then leave the area. The mother will not return if people or pets are present.

Dolphins and Whales

A whale or dolphin on the beach is always an emergency. They do not naturally spend time on land. The Los Angeles County Lifeguards respond to calls about stranded dolphins or whales. If you find a dolphin or whale stranded on the beach, contact the Lifeguard Station, police or rehabilitation service immediately. Do not attempt to put the animal back in the water. Do not approach a live, stranded whale. They are extremely dangerous.

There are a few things you can do, however; if you find a stranded dolphin:

- Dig a small pool in the sand around the animal, with depressions for its front flippers. The flippers are very delicate and cannot support the weight of the animal. The animal should be placed upright in the shallow pool. Rinse any sand out of the animal's eyes.
- Keep the animal's skin wet by frequently pouring water on it. Do not put water into the blowhole, as this will drown the animal! Cover the animal, except the blowhole, with wet towels.
- Provide shade if possible. Dolphin skin is prone to sun and wind burn when out of water.

Dead Marine Mammals

Contact your local marine mammal rescue organization if you find a dead seal, sea lion, dolphin or whale on the beach.

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Ducks in Pools

Adults

- Pool covers are the BEST solution, a huge tarp could be used as well.
- DO NOT FEED.
- Use the pool and yard area - especially noisy children and dogs.
- Trim back low growing shrubbery (nesting areas).
- Put large inflated beach balls and pool floats in pool.
- If you see a mallard couple, chase them out of your yard – they are looking for a nesting site. Chasing them will discourage ducks from nesting in your yard.
- If you see a nest WITHOUT eggs, destroy the nest. If it already has eggs, it is illegal to disturb it.
- Take an empty soda can, put a few pennies in it, tape it shut. This can be thrown near ducks to scare them.
- If the duck is visibly INJURED, it should be caught and brought in. If it has a leg injury but can fly, it will be extremely difficult to catch.

Ducklings (VERY difficult situation, no easy answer)

- Important to get the ducklings out of the pool!!! Use something that floats (such as a boogie board, piece of styrofoam, etc., place one end on edge of pool, and drape with a terrycloth towel over it into the water.
- Relocation is illegal and would require catching the mother (she can fly).
- If there is a water source within walking distance, the family may be herded out of the yard to the water source (this may take a community effort).
- It may take two months before ducklings can fly away.

About CWC

California Wildlife Center operates under US Fish and Wildlife Service permit MB006662-1, California Department of Fish and Game permit R5-02-WCR-09, and a contract with the City of Malibu. Our Federal Tax Identification Number is 95-4580790.

How to Reach Us

What should you do if you find a sick, injured or orphaned wild animal? If you live in Los Angeles, Orange or Southern Ventura counties, CWC can help you either directly or in partnership with other organizations. Please contact us directly at: CWC Hospital: 818.591.9453; 8 a.m. – 6 p.m., seven days a week; or Emergency Hotline: 310.458.WILD (310.458.9453).