# WILDLIFE CARE OF VENTURA COUNTY

RESCUE, REHABILITATION AND RELEASE OF INJURED AND ORPHANED WILD ANIMALS

# NATURE'S VOICE

MAY 2006, VOLUME #3, EDITION #3

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**BOOTH DATES**:

** 2ND WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH AT THE NORTHRIDGE FARMERS MARKET

** 2ND SUNDAY OF THE MONTH AT THE OXNARD FARMERS MARKET

## Mice, Rats and Bugs ..... Oh My!

I will be the first to admit that I like my home devoid of bugs, my attic un inhabited by four legged guests, my gardens to be pristine and blooming with flowering shrubs and plants - not being devoured by weeds, aphids or cute little subterranean creatures with big teeth.

This issue of Nature's Voice will attempt to draw our attention beyond what we want and need for mostly aesthetic reasons to what actually is spiraling beyond our control once the stage is set.

**Newton's First Law of Motion:**
**"For every action there is a reaction equal in magnitude and opposite in direction."**

The tiny footprints of 1 poisoned rat… feeling ill stumbles out into the open …catching the eye of a barn owl who has been hunting in the area for over 5 years because of the abundance of prey. Consuming at least 1-2 rats per night, multiplied by 365 days, times 5 years = 1,825 rats in 5 years. If he is feeding a family you can multiply that number by at least 5.

So.....He eagerly consumes the poisoned rat and by morning is on the ground to weak to fly, eyes at half mast and, depending on the poison either bleeding too death or every cell in his body is being drained of its fluid - causing severe dehydration. By nightfall he is still alive but unable or unwilling to move and is encountered by yet another larger predator – a bobcat, coyote, great horned owl or a raccoon who all will eagerly accept an easy meal.

Depending on the size of this second predator and the amount of poisoned prey ingested, it may take hours, days or months to actually kill the animal. By slowly building up toxins within the animal's body, compromising their immune system and the very organs whose job it is to cleanse and protect, the body gets overwhelmed and cannot function to full capacity, predisposing the animal to parasites and illness they may ordinarily be able to fight off, eventually killing them.

And sooo.... The story goes, here is where an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Once an animal has found a good hunting or foraging spot, it will remain - until the area is not productive anymore and it is forced to move on in search of better hunting grounds... or die. There are very basic reasons why animals are where they are ....including mice, rats and bugs. Let's start anticipating and addressing the situation before it becomes a potential problem. It's really a sad state of affairs when another living creature dies - for just being and doing what he needs to do to survive. It's our job as stewards of this planet to look beyond our immediate wants, desires and actions and find solutions that will benefit or at least not harm other living creatures.....who also need this planet to survive.

**We will never eradicate all the vermin. Our only hope is managing numbers, altering our perception of their usefulness, and keeping their natural predators alive.....**

*Anna M. Reams*

# DO YOU HAVE A HAND IN KILLING OUR WILDLIFE ...

1

2

3

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# ... BY POISONING THEIR FOOD SOURCE?

**1) Greenback Heron-**
Fish, small mice and insects.
**2) Raccoons -**
Small mammals, birds, insects, trash, carrion and fruit
**3) Great Horned Owl -**
Rabbits, rodents, frogs and other smaller owls
**4) Bobcat -**
Rodents, ground squirrels, rabbits and small mammals
**5) Opossum -**
Insects, snails, small rodents, fruit, vegetables, carrion and trash
**6) Ravens -**
Carrion, bird eggs, young small mammals, insects and berries
**7) Hummingbird -**
Insects and nectar
**8) Coopers Hawk -**
Small birds, mammals and pigeons
**9) Screech Owl -**
Insects and small mammals
**10) Coyote -**
Small mammals, ground squirrels, carrion, berries, vegetables and insects

**Burrowing Owl** - Small rodents and insects

## Pesticide Impacts on Wildlife

**1)** Widely used pesticides are not particularly specific for the "target" organism. **Such pesticides can cause unintended and unwanted effects to "non-target" resources**. Species can be exposed to pesticides by many routes, with the simplest form being direct contact or ingestion.
**2)** Animals can ingest pesticides indirectly through contaminated foods such as leafy material, seeds, and prey (including insects and other animals), or by water contamination through precipitation and irrigation (puddles, drinking water, bathing water or breeding).
**3)** Aquatic organisms can be exposed to pesticides entering water bodies through runoff and groundwater infiltration. Measurable amounts of pesticides have been detected in rainwater.
**4)** Indirect effects of pesticides can also have significant implications to animal species. For example, herbicide drift can harm plants and consequently damage the habitat upon which an animal species depends. A given pesticide can be relatively non-toxic to an animal species, but may be lethal to its prey or food plants. Similarly, an insecticide can indirectly harm an endangered plant that may depend upon a specific insect pollinator.
**5)** Wildlife, for example, are more susceptible to pesticide effects during nesting, nursing of young or during times of low food availability.
**6)** Primary exposure includes eating, drinking, preening of feathers, skin contact or breathing of vapors.
**7) Secondary exposure occurs from scavenging on contaminated food,** such as exposed carcasses, or feeding upon insects. If pesticide levels are high enough, wildlife often die suddenly.
**8) Not as readily observed in wildlife are the sublethal, or non-fatal, consequences of ingesting pesticides.** Behavior changes, weight loss, impaired or unsuccessful reproduction, high offspring mortality or deformed embryos are results of sublethal exposure to pesticides. Affected wildlife become easy prey for predators, while many lose their ability to adapt to environmental changes.
**9) Pesticides can reduce insects that may be important food sources for young birds and fish,** and habitat is similarly reduced when vegetation is destroyed -- a critical factor for small wildlife populations already stressed by insufficient habitat.

## Our gardens are aesthetically pleasing to us, as well as an invitation to dine by our wildlife ... let's not serve them their last meal

Environmentally responsible ways of tending to our gardens involve keeping our plants healthy by first choosing plants likely to grow well in your garden spot and by selecting plants and shrubs that are not a delicacy to the wildlife in your area. Natives are a good choice, giving them the proper water, food and maintenance. Watch for early signs of disease or infestation. If either is observed, mechanical controls include removing the diseased portion of the plant or the whole plant, if necessary; a strong spray from your water hose can remove clinging insects; a gentle spray of water in the morning will get rid of powdery mildew (whereas at night, it will encourage mildew). If chemical controls are necessary (hopefully, the last resort), using the least toxic is best for our environment. Many common household products can be effective and are less harmful than the chemicals sold in garden stores. For example, a mixture of baking soda and liquid soap will treat both black spot fungus and powdery mildew. An insecticidal soap solution can be purchased at garden stores.

Most of the herbicide use in the U.S. is applied to lawns. Since a lawn has very little value for wildlife and also consumes an enormous amount of water, fertilizer and care, reducing the size or totally eliminating your lawn would make a big dent in herbicide use. Keeping a layer of mulch on all bare soil areas will inhibit weed growth as well as conserve soil moisture and improve soil structure. When weeds appear, pulling them out works well and best done before they go to seed. This is good exercise! Weeds in cracked concrete is asphalt can be killed with a propane torch or a strong vinegar solution.

**MANY HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS ARE PESTICIDES:**

Examples: cockroach spray and baits, insect repellents for personal use, rat and other rodent poisons, flea and tick sprays, powders and pet collars, kitchen, laundry and bath disinfectants and sanitizers, products that kill mold and mildew, some lawn and garden products, such as weed killers and even some swimming pool chemicals.

**National Wildlife Federation (Habitat Steward)**

**Learn more environmentally-friendly, non toxic gardening practices at:**

www.finegardening.com
(click on pests and diseases)

www.wasteless.org
(click on environmentally preferable purchasing and then on less toxic gardening/IPM)

**Pest Prevention:**

http://ipmguidelines.org

**National Pest Information Center:**

www.npic@ace.orst.edu
www.epa.gov

Toll Free Hot line (800) 858-7378

**Alan Pollack**

# RODENT CONTROL BY POISON? OR BY RAPTORS....

Local governments, agriculturalists and homeowners are resorting to rodenticides such as D-Con to reduce rodent populations, such as: black rats, pocket gophers, and California ground squirrels who are benefiting from the urbanization and agriculture in California. In so doing, we are further reducing the natural predator populations through secondary poisoning. In fact, the poison used in D-Con, brodifacoum, is so potent that it has even led to tertiary poisoning of carnivores as large as mountain lions. Once poisoning campaigns have begun the natural prey-predator cycle is disrupted, and it often seems necessary to continue poisoning in perpetuity.

## ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES? YES, BUT THEY REQUIRE TIME AND PATIENCE.

**The first step is to stop using anticoagulant poisons and substitute rodenticides that do not cause secondary poisoning:**

* Ramage (bromethalin)
* Quintox (vitamin D)
* Fumitoxin (zinc or aluminum phosphide)

These toxicants kill only the primary target species. When the poisoning of non target species stops, their numbers increase, and they return the natural balance between prey and predator. This never eradicates the rodent species, but neither does poisoning.

The next step after curtailing the use of poisons is to encourage the return of raptors and small carnivores. The most effective predator of the pocket gopher is the barn owl, which hunts mainly by acoustic location of its prey. Pocket gophers seldom emerge from their holes any further than is necessary to cut off vegetable stalks and pull them into their tunnels. A barn owl can hear them chewing on the stalks and can strike them in complete darkness.

Barn owl nesting boxes, consist of a 16 or 24 inch cube that can be assembled from 1/2 inch plywood. The box should have a 6 inch diameter hole in an upper corner and can be anchored in a tree with eye bolts and cable or rope or mounted on a 2 x 4 and lag-bolted to a tree or barn as high as is feasible (12 foot minimum) and in the quietest and shadiest place available. The nest box should have a substrate such as pine needles or shredded bark. It's best not to use hay or straw, since these encourage toxic mold. Once barn owls have become well established in a nest box, they will tolerate a lot of noise, but they will sometimes leave if their nest box is disturbed while they are in it. It's best to leave them alone for the first year.

In addition to installing nest boxes, the installation of T-perches on poles or sturdy plastic pipe will aid hawks and owls in hunting on your property.

Case study #1: T-perches installed in a Moorpark development that had found rodenticides unacceptable achieved a level of rodent control the residents found acceptable. Just the presence of a hawk on a perch serves to drive rodents underground and raises their stress levels enough to interfere with reproduction.

Case study #2: The Lodi Grape Growers Association has achieved satisfactory gopher control by installing barn owl boxes on poles in the vineyards.

**Pete Triem**
**Ojai Raptor Center**

Freeway our non-releasable educational barn owl was hit 6 years ago on one of California's freeways and continues to be an ambassador for his species.

## THE BARN OWL (Tyto alba)

The Barn Owl has nearly world-wide distribution, being absent from only the high latitudes. It has been introduced into some Pacific islands for rat control and is provided nest boxes in Malaysian palm nut groves for the same purpose. While the barn owl is found all over the US, its numbers are particularly high in California and the Southwest. Farmers and ranchers are increasingly attracted to the barn owl's ability to control rodents better than traps, poison, or cats and at no cost.

Barn owls in favorable habitats produce large broods once or twice a year. Each young owl as it nears maturity will eat a dozen mice per night if such prey is available. Adult barn owls kill and consume one large rat or gopher per night. The Owl Rehabilitation Research Foundation, Ontario, Canada, reports that barn owls consume twice as much food for their weight as other owls.

The number of barn owls in an area is limited by both prey base and suitable nesting sites. In the West, barn owls not only nest in natural tree cavities and buildings, they also nest in cavities in cliffs and cut banks, stacked hay bales, and in palm trees. Use of these sites often leads to nesting failure such as when bales are shifted or the young outgrows the nest at the base of palm fronds.

California ground squirrels

Baby barn owls received March 2006 on a hay truck from Northern California - Barn owls will typically nest precariously on the tops of hay trucks bound for the south or in the fronds of palm trees, fireplace chimneys, attic crawl spaces, vacant buildings or, if available, nest boxes.

BARN OWL NEST BOX- Plans for construction and specifics on installation may be obtained from the email address below.

ALPAT62@AOL.COM or by calling Alan Pollack at (818) 340-2347

Already constructed nest boxes are available for a small donation by calling the above number.

# CALIFORNIA GROUND SQUIRRELS

These small mammals are found all the way into the northern part of Baja California. They can be found in plains, small meadows, tree-covered hillsides, rocky outcrops and granite taluses. Their fur is gray, light brown and dusky colored, all mixed together to give it a mottled appearance. Extending from the head over the middle of the back is a slightly darker band of fur with capes of gray covering the sides of the head and shoulders. This cape breaks up the animal's body outline, making it more difficult for a predator to spot. The whitish fur rings around the eyes are for protection from the intense sunlight.

They live in burrows and like sites that can be excavated horizontally like hillsides and low earth banks, although they may dig down several feet to assure protection. While only about four to five inches in diameter, they can vary in length from five feet to more than thirty-five feet and many generations will use the same hole. They may be occupied by only one or be a colonial home for several.

Breeding season is from February to April with mating chases being a common sight. After a month-long gestation the mother will give birth from three to as many as fifteen babies with five to six being average. The babies stay underground with the mother, their eyes opening at about five weeks, and around the eighth week they are ready to come out of the burrow and explore the world above. At first the youngsters will play and feed very close to the burrow's entrance under the close supervision and watch of the mother. During the summer they spend most of the day feeding, sunning, dust-bathing and grooming. Their diet consists of a variety of seeds, fruits, acorns, roots, mushrooms, insects and even small rodents.

Most of their life is spent in a fairly small area, within 100 feet of their burrow. **This indicates that they do not move into areas where people are but rather developments for people move in where ground squirrels are already living.**

California ground squirrels hibernate for several months of the year with the length depending on where they live. The males are the first to begin hibernation with the females and young following over a month later. **They go into true hibernation which is like suspended animation**. Their heart rate slows down to as little as only a tenth of its normal rate, and respiration will slow down to where they take a breath every couple of minutes. Even in this state, they wake up every four to five days for short periods during which they will eat food stored in their special chambers and use special bathroom chambers. The males will be the first to emerge in the spring.

**Interesting facts:**

1) In some areas adult squirrels may spend as much as eight months dormant in their burrows
2) A group of scientists found a ground squirrel home occupied by 6 females and 5 males that totaled 741 feet in length with thirty three openings. The deepest tunnel was twenty-eight feet below ground.
3) Ground squirrels help aerate the soil, **providing habitat for other animals, as well as having their burrows used by several different species.** They are food for many predators.
4) Most of the conflicts with ground squirrels come in areas where people like to feed them. With an abundance of food, they will have larger litters. Unfortunately, this usually results in the poisoning of squirrels.
5) **Ground squirrels can take on rattlesnakes...and win!** Where Pacific rattlesnakes are common they have a high resistance to that particular snake's venom, offering a key to developing better treatment for snake venom for humans.

**Sharron Baird**

Resources: Charles Larsen / Lois Hoy / National Geographic

# BIRD FLU AND "BACKYARD BIRDS"

### What is bird flu?

Bird flu is a virus that makes birds sick. There are many types of bird flu but most do not infect people. One type of bird flu called Asian H5N1 can be passed from birds to people. It has recently spread in birds across Asia and into Europe. Since 2003, over 160 people have caught this virus from contact with sick poultry (farm birds), and about half of the people died. This virus is not yet in California, or anywhere in the United States.

### How is this virus being spread?

Migrating birds that are infected are thought to be carrying the virus across the world. The virus is in their feces. Poultry that run loose in the open and share their feed with wild birds become infected and have died in large numbers, sometimes passing on the virus to people. Commercial farmers in the United States are already experienced with protecting their poultry, their workers and the meat and eggs they sell from diseases like this. **Most "backyard bird" owners are not prepared to protect themselves.**

### What are "backyard birds?"

They are small groups of farm birds, mostly chickens, that people keep on their home property. Many people have "backyard birds" here in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. They are found from Compton to Palos Verdes, from Canyon Country to East LA. They are kept as pets, for meat and eggs, or for illegal cockfighting.

### How can "backyard birds" give the virus to their owners?

If a bird gets infected with the virus, the virus lives in the feces and tissues of the bird. When blood, feces, or tissues from the birds contact the eyes, mouth, or nose of a person, there is risk of passing on the virus. A person may handle a sick bird or touch fecal material and then unconsciously touch their own face and get infected. Slaughtering, plucking feathers, and direct contact with bird feces from infected poultry carriy special danger. Some people outside of the U.S. caught the virus from the neighbor's chickens who were allowed to roam loose in the neighborhood, contaminating areas with fecal material.

### I have backyard chickens. How can I protect my family from this virus Asian H5N1?

The first step in protecting your family from this virus is to protect the health of your birds. Right now there is no vaccine against the virus for use in birds in the United States, so you must protect your birds in other ways.
1) Keep all types of wild birds away from your chickens and their food and water by housing your chickens.
2) Keep new chickens away from your chickens for at least a two week quarantine period.
3) Use food sanitation.
4) Thoroughly cook meat and eggs.
5) Report illnesses in your chickens.

If you know about a group of wild birds dying anywhere in **Los Angeles County,** please report it to Veterinary Public Health **(562-401-7088 )**

**Ventura County Environmental Health Division (805-654-2816) www.ventura.org/envhealth**

Comprehensive information about Pandemic Flu and Avian Flu: Official website: **www.pandemicflu.gov**

(Excerpts taken from County of Los Angeles Department of Health Services Veterinary Health Rabies Control Program)
**www.lapublichealth.org/vet**

# WEST NILE

West Nile is transmitted to people and animals through the bite of infected mosquitoes. Mosquitoes become infected when feeding on wild birds with WNV in their blood. Only certain species of mosquitoes carry the virus and very few mosquitoes are actually infected.

Birds: Wild birds are the primary reservoirs of WNV in the environment. WVN infection has been reported in more than 100 bird species. Many of these species of birds are developing antibodies to fight the virus and do recover. Many birds infected with WNV will not appear ill, however, the virus can cause serious illness and death in some birds, especially among the corvid birds, which include crows, jays, ravens and magpies.

## MOSQUITO FACTS:

1) All mosquitoes need water to develop. Adult flying mosquitoes frequently rest in grass, shrubbery or other foliage, but they never develop there.
2) **Some mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water where they hatch in a day or two.**
3) Other mosquitoes lay their eggs in old tires, tin cans, or other water holding containers where they may remain unhatched for weeks or months until they are covered with water.
4) With both types of mosquitoes, the wigglers (larvae) grow quickly and turn into tumblers (pupae).
5) **Mosquitoes can develop from eggs to adults in 7-10 days.**

## ARE YOU RAISING MOSQUITOES!

You can help reduce mosquito populations around your home by eliminating standing water. Start with a thorough inspection of where you live to determine sources of standing water.
1) Water-holding containers of any kind
2) Wading pools/ swimming pools
3) Pet dishes, birdbaths
4) Cut flowers and plant cuttings
5) Roofs and gutters
6) Leaky faucets and hoses
7) Drainage basins
8) Septic systems
9) Ornamental ponds
10) Brooks and drains
11) Hollow tree stumps

## IF MOSQUITOES STILL BOTHER YOU!

If you are sure that you have taken sufficient action to minimize mosquitoes around your home, but you are continually bothered by them, the source may be distant from your home. These problems should be reported to:
**Ventura County Environmental Health Division by calling 805-654-2816**

Excerpts taken from Ventura County Environmental Health Division
(805) 654-2816
www.ventura.org/envhealth

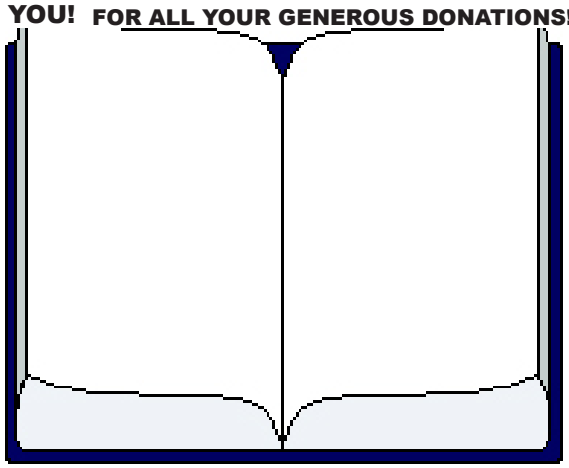
# YES, I WANT TO HELP NATIVE WILDLIFE AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

BURROWING OWL....RELEASED 2006

ORPHANED HUMMINGBIRDS..... RELEASED 2005!

COYOTE RELEASED 2005

**WE CANNOT DO THE WORK WE DO WITHOUT ALL OF YOU. THANK YOU! FOR ALL YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS!**



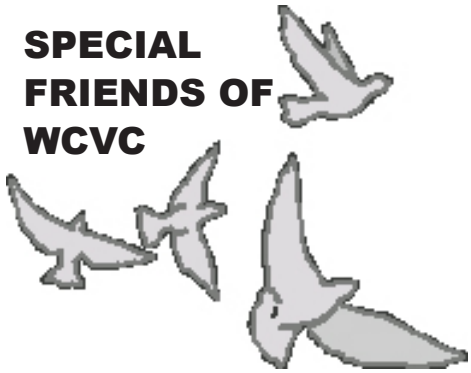
Your donation of $25.00 or more will entitle you to continue to receive our semi-annual newsletter!
**WCVC is a non-profit organization** and all contributions are tax-deductible.
$25.00 _____ $35.00 _____
$50.00 _____ $100.00_____
$_____ Other Amount

**Join our Team and be a part of the solution!**
_____ I would like to help care for wild birds or small mammals in my home.
_____ I would like to assist other rehabbers a few hours a week.
_____ **I would enjoy transporting animals within my work route from local agencies to rehabilitators.**
_____ I would like information on WCVC's wildlife educational presentations.
_____ I would like information on a program for my area on COYOTE AWARENESS.

**NAME:** _____
**ADDRESS:** _____
_____
**PHONE NUMBER:** _____
**PLEASE MAIL TO :**
**Wildlife Care of Ventura County**

WCVC is permitted through the State Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and USDA.

## SPECIAL FRIENDS OF WCVC



Conejo Valley Veterinarian Clinic
Shirley Blanchard
Bear Thompson, DVM
June Yanaginuma
Audoubon Society of W. Hollywood
Jack Edelstein
Robb Quint / Jerry Burns
Valley Veterinarian Clinic
Verizon Foundation - Pat Katz
Los Angeles Zoo
Thousand Oaks Rotary
Jean Marie Webster
Stevens Nursery
Full O Life
Googalone Inc.
Wilbur Prim
Shirley Richardson

WILDLIFE CARE OF VENTURA COUNTY
P.O. BOX 941476, SIMI VALLEY CA 93065

**The following garden centers are helping to promote alternatives to highly toxic chemical pesticides.**

**Camarillo:** B & B Do-it-Center / Baron Brothers Nursery / Green Meadow Nursery Maravilla Gardens
**Fillmore:** Otto & Sons Nursery
**Moorpark:** Elegant Gardens Nursery
**Newbury Park:** Nordic Nursery
**Ojai:** Matillija Gardens
**Oxnard:** Glasshouse Nursery
**Santa Paula:** Santa Paula Fruit Growers
**Somis:** Dobson Nursery Ranch / Plant Warehouse
**Thousand Oaks:** Armstrong Garden Center / Orchard Supply & Hardware
**Ventura**: Green Thumb

## NATURAL RODENT DETERRENTS

**1)** Rodents and especially mice are allergic to oil of peppermint and will not frequent a property where they can smell it. If you place a few drops of oil of peppermint on a piece of cotton and place it anywhere you feel that there is a mouse problem, you will never see them again. Use only the “real” oil of peppermint, not peppermint extract, for the best results. You can also plant peppermint in your garden to keep all types of rodents away from the plants. They are also repelled by camphor and pine tar.
**2)** There are a few ground covers that rodents do not like to live in or be around. These are adjuga, carpet bugle, cape weed, chamomile, Indian rock strawberry and creeping speed well
**3)** Hire some barn owls to address your rodent problem by installing some nesting boxes. A family of 6 barn owls can consume as many as 16 or more rats in one night.
**4)** Rodents will avoid certain plants that give off repulsive scents. These include daffodils, hyancinths and scillia.
**5)** Gopher purge (uphorbia lathyrus) is a plant that contains pods each containing three seeds. The plant is a natural repellent to gophers and moles and all other burrowing animals. The roots are so poisonous to them as well as humans that it will eliminate the problem.

## WILDLIFE CARE OF VENTURA COUNTY

WCVC is a non-profit all volunteer organization holding permits through the California Department of Fish and Game, United States Fish and Wildlife and USDA. The organization was founded in 1994 and rehabilitates all native wildlife with the exception of bear, mountain lion and deer.

Our volunteers specialize in one or more species and operate as a team of dedicated and highly trained individuals.

We work very closely with veterinarians who provide medical care, x-rays, surgery and humane euthanasia when necessary. Beyond the immediate benefits of helping wildlife in need, WCVC provides a valuable service to the entire community by making help accessible to those who find wildlife in distress. Our mission is to rescue, rehabilitate and release, as well as educating the public on how to co-exist with our wild neighbors.