Stanislaus Wildlife Care Center

Fall 2025

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Creature Feature

Coyote

Coyote pup ready for release

Each year, the SWCC receives between five and twenty-five coyote pups and one or two adults. Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are common in this area. They are often misunderstood and maligned.

From a distance, they look as big as a German Shepard, but they are all legs and fur. Coyotes usually weigh between eighteen and twenty-five pounds. Their footprint is barely an inch and a half wide and a little over two inches long. And their nose is a little over an inch across.

In contrast, the average Labrador Retriever weighs sixty to seventy pounds. Their footprint is three and a half inches wide and a little over four inches long.

Coyotes have about a dozen different vocalizations, and their voices carry for long distances. Three coyotes can sound like twelve.

Coyotes are omnivores that eat fruits, vegetables, and seeds, even grass if nothing else is available, but they prefer small rodents. Each year, a typical coyote eats around 107 rabbits or 3,400 mice, gophers, and ground squirrels.

They live in small family groups and hunt as individuals, not in packs like wolves, so they are limited to hunting small prey. They will eat carrion and are often blamed for killing the livestock they scavenge.

US Department of Agriculture (USDA) data for 2015 shows that less than 0.3% of the US cows and sheep (including calves and lambs) were lost to all carnivores combined—including coyotes, wolves, cougars, bears, dogs, and other carnivores. Most cows and sheep die from disease, illness, birthing problems, and weather.

Coyotes prefer to avoid humans and seldom attack. An average of ten coyote bites are reported in the US each year, and 4.5 million dog bites, with 800,000 requiring medical attention.

The Mission of SWCC is to promote respect for wildlife & increase the public's awareness of the importance of preserving wildlife through the care of injured and orphaned California native wild animals and community education.

Coyotes continued

The coyote is considered a fur-bearing mammal and may be hunted. In California, there is no season or limit on the number of coyotes a hunter may take. However, killing coyotes to reduce their numbers doesn't work. They regulate their population density and will repopulate an area within a year.

Newborn coyotes are chocolate brown with white feet, a white tip on their tails, and a white blaze on their chest. Compared to dogs, their noses and feet are tiny.

Young coyote singing. Our coyotes seldom make any noise except when a siren goes by. Then they yip and howl as if their lives depended upon it.

Coyotes mate for life. Both the male and female care for the pups. Most pups set out on their own at around nine months, but a few stay with the parents and help raise the next litter.

If the family group is stable, only the dominant male and female mate. And they have a small litter of three to five pups each year. But if one of them is killed, all the females mate and have large litters of six to eight pups. And there will be more female pups than males.

Life-size footprint from a sixty- to seventy-pound dog like a Labrador Retriever.

Life-size adult coyote footprint.

Each year, a typical coyote eats around 107 rabbits or 3,400 mice, gophers, and ground squirrels.

Three-week-old coyotes. They have lost their newborn fur and blue eyes. At this age, they prefer mice over formula. In another two weeks, they can go into the big enclosure.

Coyotes are apex predators. They help maintain a healthy ecosystem by keeping rodent populations in check. And, like vultures, they clean up dead animals, thus reducing the spread of disease.

Coyotes also help control the population of other predators such as opossums, raccoons, and foxes. Those animals actively search for bird nests both on the ground and in trees.

In wild areas around cities that are too fragmented to support coyote populations, the numbers of opossums, raccoons, and foxes increase, while the number and diversity of birds decrease.

Coyotes are extremely intelligent and very high-strung. They are susceptible to capture myopathy, which is a failure to thrive or recover because of stress. It is like being terrified all the time, unable to relax, sleep, or eat.

We get the baby coyotes outside as soon as possible and spend only the absolute minimum time cleaning their enclosure to prevent stress and keep them wild.

It takes some running to catch a coyote in their enclosure, but once we net it, it gives up, cowering in fear.

We release in areas that are far from houses, cattle, or sheep.

For more information on coyotes and for non-lethal coyote management techniques, please visit the Project Coyote website https://projectcoyote.org/

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Typical Coyote Release Site.

Pelican

California has two kinds of Pelicans, white pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) and brown pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*). White pelicans are white with yellow feet and beaks and black flight feathers that hardly show unless the bird is flying. Brown pelicans are brownish, with whiteish heads and darker beaks and feet. Brown pelicans live on the coast and eat ocean fish. White pelicans live inland and eat freshwater fish.

We don't receive pelicans very often, so we get really excited when one comes in. This October, we received a white pelican with coordination and balance problems. There are four common causes for these symptoms: head trauma from a collision, West Nile Virus, Bird Flu, and botulism.

Our pelican. To reduce stress, we first put him outside then brought him inside.

Bird Flu is highly contagious and almost always fatal. We seldom take chances, opting to euthanize Bird Flu cases as soon as possible to prevent spread to other animals, including our animal ambassadors. Besides balance and coordination, Bird Flu also causes cloudy eyes. The pelican's eyes were clear, so we ruled out Bird Flu.

The pelican was found in a wildlife area far from cars or anything he might collide with hard enough to cause a brain injury. And he didn't have any injuries. Head trauma was ruled out.

He was not in an area where botulism was found or suspected.

Our best guess was West Nile.

West Nile is caused by a virus. The only treatment is support. Keep the bird safe and well-fed, and hope he recovers on his own.

White pelicans breed in the northern US. In California, they winter in lakes and marshes.

Pelicans are surprisingly big. They have a nine-foot wingspan and weigh between twenty and thirty pounds. If you stretch one out on the ground, the tip of the beak to the tip of the tail will measure over five feet. Their beak is over a foot long. That doesn't sound like much, but when the bird comes at you beak wide open, it looks as if you might get swallowed. However, their bite is more annoying than dangerous.

During breeding season, white pelicans' beaks sprout a flat horn called a nuptial tubercle. These fall off after the breeding season.

Although brown pelicans dive for fish, white pelicans scoop up fish as they swim. From our perspective, the main thing is, they eat fish, lots of fish – expensive, low-calorie fish.

Since this one is sick and underweight, he needs a lot of fish.

Pelican's beaks and mouths are not like other birds. They can open their beak impressively wide to form a large, flexible scoop. Although they do have a tongue, it is about the size of a large sunflower seed.

Pelicans often have lice living in their mouths. Since they don't have usable tongues, they can't do much about the lice. This bird had a lot of lice, so we treated him to get rid of the pests.

Unfortunately, not every animal survives, including this pelican. At first, it seemed as if he was recovering, but after a few days, he went further downhill. Nothing we did reversed that. His West Nile test was negative.

The necropsy (post-mortem exam) showed abnormal kidneys and adrenal glands. We don't know what caused that, but given the state of his kidneys and adrenal glands, I doubt anything would have saved his life.

US Fish and Wildlife Service photo of a white pelican in breeding plumage. Notice the more colorful beak and the bump on his beak – his nuptial tubercle. Both males and females have nuptial tubercles during breeding season.

New Permit Requirements

A Little History

Back in 1984, when we first started the SWCC, all we needed was a letter from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's regional manager and a migratory bird permit from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Once we had the state permit, the federal permit was almost automatic.

The International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (IWRC) was only twelve years old. The National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (NWRA) was only two years old. And it would be nine years before the California Council for Wildlife Rehabilitation (CCWR) was founded. The IWRC and NWRA published journals and books on caring for injured and orphaned wildlife. They offered classes and had annual symposiums. Without their guidance, we wouldn't have known what to do with many of the animals we received.

We started with cardboard box cages and a rudimentary knowledge of wildlife care. As time passed, we improved our facilities and our care techniques. The first hospital was in a garage and the second in and thirty year old trailer in someone's back forty in Ceres.

In 1992 we moved to Fox Grove. Since then, we have continued to improve our facilities striving to meet or exceed the minimum standards for caging and care.

Screech owl flight cage 1985.

Ceres location – 1986 to 1992

Eventually, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDF&W) hired a liaison to work with wildlife rehab centers. That position has grown into a small department with several people overseeing us.

Even the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has gotten involved. We now need a permit from them for our animal ambassadors.

Big changes

Recent satellite view of the SWCC grounds. This looks as if it was taken in early 2025.

This year, new laws were passed regulating wildlife rehabilitation centers. These regulations cover the sizes and materials used to cage just about any animal we might receive. They set standards for care, staffing, and other things. And they established requirements for starting a wildlife rehabilitation center, including needed facilities, education, and training.

In many ways, this makes our lives harder, but it also ensures that all centers meet minimum standards of care, which is good for the animals.

Many of our outside enclosures do not meet all the new standards. For example, the duck pond is surrounded by a chain-link fence that meets standards. But it is supposed to be lined with netting, including the ceiling. That requires 1260 sq. ft. of netting. Also, there is a gap between the concrete curbing and the fence, which needs to be filled in.

We use heavy netting with a 3/8-inch opening. It will last for many years. Even raptors can't damage it. And the openings are large enough to prevent wind-blown leaves and debris from collecting in the netting.

Almost all of our aviaries need netting on the ceilings. Plus the pond, it equals 7,600 sq. ft. At around $1.80 per sq. ft., plus shipping and fasteners, it comes to about $15,000. Not to mention the time and labor to install it.

The netting is a good idea because birds injure themselves by flying into the wire ceilings. But the time and expense will be difficult.

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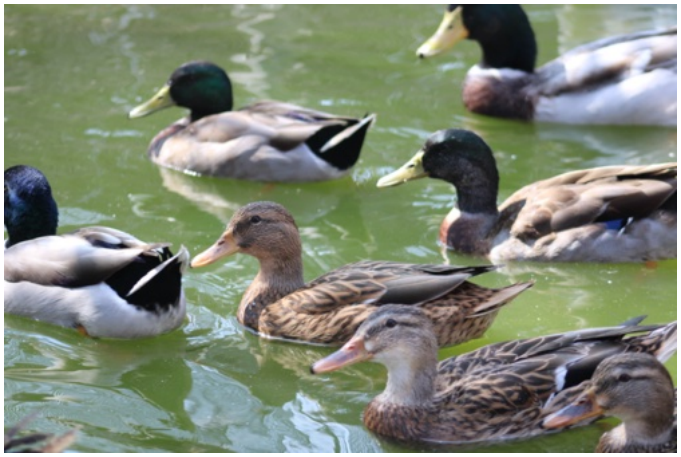
DCF&W Grants

For the past several years, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has made grants to qualifying wildlife rehabilitation centers from the state income tax voluntary contributions fund. We qualified for a $15,000.00 grant last year, but we will have to wait until next year to get the money.

Fewer people contributed to this fund, and there wasn't enough money to award all the grants. So, CDF&W will not be accepting grant applications in 2026, but will continue to award existing grants as funds become available.

We were planning to use that money to upgrade some of our duck holding pens. As the picture shows, they are less than ideal. We want to replace the three little cages with one large, zoo-quality enclosure.

Duck holding pens. These house ducks that are too big for our brooders but too little to go into the pond. We will replace them as soon as we get the money to do so.



Our pond got a little crowded this spring.

It was especially difficult this year because we had more ducks and geese than expected. We normally receive around 200 ducks and geese a year. This year, we received 250 ducks and geese.

Hopefully, the grant will be awarded before next year's baby duck season.

And while I am talking about getting more than the normal number of animals, we usually admit around 200 opossums a year. This year, we took in 320 opossums. No wonder we had opossums everywhere for a few months.

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Supplies We Need

Paper Towels
Scrub Brushes
Puppy Pads
13 gal plastic garbage bags
Dishwashing Gloves all sizes

Visit our Amazon Wish List for other ideas.

Volunteers & Money

Mama opossum with babies. This year, we had a huge number of opossum babies. Unfortunately, none had a mama opossum to care for them.

SWCC Staff

Executive Director
Donna Burt

Facility Manager
Nancy Klein

Senior Animal Care Coordinator
Michelle Mason

Animal Care Coordinators
Duane Dahl
Eduardo Escobedo
Daniel Pankey
Pam Miller

Grounds Keeper
Alex Mendoza

Board of Directors

Donna Burt	Chairperson
Linda Weidman	Vice-Chair
Cindy Manning	Treasurer
Phil McKay	Member
Dr. Doug Marks	Veterinarian

Thank You!

The last newsletter had a plea for money. We were rather short of funds.

Thank you, to everyone who helped. I can't say we are currently rolling in dough, but the immediate crisis has been averted.

We are always happy to receive donations. Watch for our Christmas fundraising letter. Donations to that letter see us through the winter and spring.

Moving??

If your address changes, please let us know. Send in the membership form or email: SWCCenter@StanislausWildlife.org

Membership Form

Name _____ Date_____

Street _____ Phone( )_____

City_____State_____Zip_____

E-mail Address_____

_____No Receipt _____Email Receipt _____Mailed Receipt

_____New Membership ____ Membership Renewal ____ General Donation _____ Restricted Donation

__$20 Individual__$30 Family __$50 Grantor __$100 Sustaining __$500 Contributor __ $1000 Donor Other $ _____

All donations are tax deductible and gratefully accepted. Please consult your tax advisor.
Make checks payable to: SWCC, P.O. Box 298, Hughson, CA 95326 - THANK YOU!
Please email SWCCenter@StanislausWildlife.org if you would like to volunteer.

The SWCC does not sell or give addresses to anyone!

The SWCC is incorporated as a 501(c)3 corporation
EIN 77-0049517

Venmo:@StanislausWildlifeCareCenter

Website Amazon Wish List PayPal Venmo

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These young jackrabbits are old enough to eat solid food but they love formula. Cottontails start eating alfalfa a few days after they open their eyes. Jackrabbits are born with their eyes open and they love formula. Se even though they can eat solid food, if formula is available they prefer that.