

Stanislaus Flyer

Fall

Stanislaus Wildlife Care Center

2018

The Mission of SWCC is to promote respect for wildlife and 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.

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Creature Feature

California Quail

By Nancy Haydock

We admitted a bunch of California Quail eggs in June. We put them in our egg incubator and hoped for the best. California quail are plump bluish-gray birds with short and stout bills and a teardrop-shaped tuft of feathers on the head, called a topknot. The male has a black face, black throat lined by white stripes, gray chest, and black and brown belly feathers that look like scales. The female has a smaller top knot, a brown head, and back and a light-colored chest and belly. They weigh between 140 and 230 grams, about as much as a smartphone.



Quail Hatching

Veronica Sandow

California Quail walk or run on their short legs, scratching for seeds and other foods on the ground. They eat seeds, leaves, flowers, catkins, grain, manzanita berries, poison oak berries, and acorns; also invertebrates such as caterpillars, beetles, mites, millipedes, and snails. Sometimes they forage in trees.

In the spring, quail travel in pairs or small family groups, during the rest of the year they congregate into larger flocks, called coveys. Coveys vary in size, usually up to seventy-five birds, but can be as large as one thousand. When a predator comes near, they burst into flight with loud wing beats.

They will roost in trees, staying in the shade most of the day to get away from the sun and protect them from predators. More often than not, one of the birds acts as a lookout while others feed. This helps keep the entire group safe from predators.

The females build their nests on the ground in grasses, at the base of shrubs, or in trees. They lay twelve to sixteen eggs and usually raise two broods each year. After twenty-three days, the eggs hatch into brown balls of fluff. Babies can walk and run within a few hours of hatching. They follow their parents searching the ground for seeds and bugs to eat. They can fly in ten days.

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Quail Care

By Veronica Sandow

On June 22, 2018 we received a mess of California Quail eggs from a construction project. Some were warm and some were cold. We couldn't tell if any would hatch, but we put them in the incubator and hoped for the best. The quail eggs had been in our incubator being automatically turned every few minutes for sixteen days. Then a single quail chipped through the shell and everyone at the center watched as the little guy struggled to get free.

Over the next few days six eggs hatched successfully. We took each new hatchling from the egg incubator and put it in our 'killdeer' cage; a temperature controlled long glass tank, which is kept at 100 degrees at one end and room temperature at the other end. Hatching is exhausting, so the little ones had to rest for several hours post-hatch before they had the strength to run around.



Quail & Cottontails

Veronica Sandow

Quail are precocial, meaning they can eat and drink on their own shortly after hatching. They follow their mother and forage with their family group. Our quail got an off-brand version of this childhood with a stuffed toy quail that, when squeezed, sounded like a quail. The babies loved their "father" quail, and when resting, would cuddle up to the stuffed animal.

The babies relied heavily on their surrogate 'parent' for the first two weeks. Anytime they perceived danger (a human cleaning their incubator,) the quail ran to their parent for protection. It was gratifying to see the quail identifying with that instead of the humans because a bird that identifies with humans does not usually survive in the wild.

As the quail got older, their need for parental protection lessened. They developed the skills needed to deal with dangerous situations. This led to a few quail bravely leaping from their indoor cage and staff scurrying after them with nets. The quail's escape attempts showed that they were ready for a pre-release aviary.

Quail are ground-dwelling birds, but they can and will fly when danger arises. The birds had several days to enjoy their new outdoor cage full of grass they could use for foraging before they got their new roommates.

Six juvenile desert cottontails also needed a pre-release cage, though not necessarily an aviary because they lack wings. The quail's

aviary worked well for both species. The rabbits and quail coexist in nature, and they did as well in this cage. The bunnies made nests in the cage's grass as well as in the shelters we had provided. The quail foraged around the nests. Occasionally the quail would visit the rabbit shelters, and the rabbits would sometimes join the birds' foraging groups.

After just a couple weeks, both the cottontails and the quail were ready to be released. The rabbits were taken back to an area east of Modesto where several had been found. The quail were also taken back to their original location in Chowchilla. Each group had a successful release with the staff and volunteers reporting proper natural behavior from the animals upon return to the wild.



Ready For Release

Veronica Sandow



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Open an Amazon Smile account and designate the SWCC as your charity. It's the same as a regular Amazon account except they donate a percentage of each purchase to us.

You don't pay anything extra, but we get some, much-needed money.

Center News

California Quail Continued from page 1

By Donna Burt

Summer Wrap Up

We have said goodbye to our two summer employees, Samantha DeKasha and Marie Droual. They were both indispensable during the busy season. I wish I could continue with six employees year-round, but there just isn't enough money.

Our long-time barn owl surrogate, Juliet, died this year. He was over sixteen years and had several health problems. He raised well over one thousand baby barn owls during his stay at the SWCC. Although he wasn't the least bit friendly, he was a wonderful parent.

We have a new barn owl that we hope will replace him. Her name is Romeo. Her injuries prevent her from being released. Next spring, we will see if she is willing to raise baby barn owls. Curley, the barn owl on display, is a human imprint and not at all interested in raising babies.

And, yes, Juliet was a male and Romeo is a female.

Raptor Aviaries

We are 80% of the way to funding our raptor aviaries. We only need \$20,000 more before we can start construction. It would be wonderful if we had these cages for next summer. The ones they are replacing are about to fall down. If you have any ideas about how to get the money, please let me know.

Repairs

Earlier this year, our water heater flooded the bathroom, lifting the vinyl flooring and destroying the particleboard subfloor. We removed the soggy particleboard but waited until the busy season was over to replace the floor. Since we had to pull the toilet, we upgraded to a low volume toilet and replaced our tiny hanging sink with a small vanity. We also changed the door, so it no longer hits the back door when open. We still need to spackle and paint.

Supplies We Always Need

- Paper Towels
- Toilet Paper (for bird nests)
- Kleenex (for bird nests)
- 13 gal plastic garbage bags
- Dishwashing Gloves (S & M)

Volunteers - Money

California quail live in the coastal sage scrub, chaparral, foothills and high desert in California. They also live in Oregon, Western Nevada, Baja California in Mexico, Idaho, Washington, Utah and southern parts of British Columbia. They have been introduced in Australia, Chile, New Zealand, Santa Rosa Island, Hawaii, and Europe.

The California Quail populations are strong and stable, showing a small increase between 1966 and 2015, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. They are a popular game bird. Hunters take between 800,000 and 1.2 million each year in California alone. This does not seem to be hurting their population.

The oldest known California Quail lived six years and eleven months.

Assembly Bill 776, passed on August 14, 1931, designated the California quail as the official state bird. In July 2000, the California quail was designated San Francisco's official city bird.

To find out what happened to the eggs, check out *Quail Care* on page 2.



Juliet

Donna Burt

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