

# Stanislaus Flyer

Summer

Stanislaus Wildlife Care Center

2021

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

### Bald Eagle



Bald Eagle

Donna Burt

*By Nancy Haydock*

Late one afternoon, the game warden called. A bald eagle was stranded on an island in the middle of Don Pedro Lake. He arrived a couple of hours later with an adult female bald eagle. She had several puncture wounds on her body that looked like she had been taloned by another eagle. She also had a much older puncture wound near her hip, causing her to limp.

Both male and female bald eagles look the same. They have white heads and tails and brown bodies. They are not bald. Their name derives from the older meaning of "white-headed." They have yellow beaks, legs, and toes. The females are much larger than the males. They weigh twelve pounds or more. Males weigh up to nine pounds. They can live for twenty or thirty years.

Bald eagles live in Canada, Alaska, the US, and northern Mexico near lakes and rivers with abundant fish and large trees for nesting. They feed mainly on

*continued on page 3*

# R.I.P Slomo



Slomo, a few weeks before he died.

Donna Burt

*By Donna Burt*

Just about exactly five years ago, a baby California ground squirrel was delivered to the center. He wasn't quite right. He had a runny nose. His tail and spine were a bit crooked. As he grew, more problems became apparent. He wasn't very coordinated, walked funny, and was too small for his age. He was otherwise healthy and seemed happy, so we kept him, thinking he could live with our other ground squirrels in the lobby.

Once ground squirrels can self-feed, their personalities change. They become extremely active and opinionated. They are very hard or impossible to keep tame and friendly. The males can become especially aggressive as they age.

This little squirrel stayed calm and friendly. He tried so hard to run fast, but he waddled and tripped. Unfazed, he kept going.

We named him Slomo.

For a while, he lived with the other squirrels in the lobby. Even though he seemed to be at a serious disadvantage, he got plenty to eat, and every night, he slept with Scrunchie, the biggest squirrel in the display.

Since he was so friendly and liked to be held (he was the only squirrel we could safely pick up), we played with him frequently.

In October 2019, Slomo developed a respiratory infection which left a large scar on his lung. As a result, he had to be hand-fed for several weeks and needed supple-

mental heat at night.

He never got strong enough to live in the display cage again. We did take him to visit his friends occasionally, but I always took him home where he had less stress.

That worked fine for about a year. Then Slomo started having bad breath, a sign of kidney disease. We wanted to send a blood sample to the lab to confirm the kidney problems, but Slomo was so small that getting enough blood was unwise. So, I put him on a low protein diet and hand-fed him extra fluids. Since he still acted like a very young squirrel, he would drink out of a syringe if he liked the flavor.

He still ran around, gathered nesting material, and loved to be held. His quality of life seemed to be good, so I continued to care for him. But the kidney disease took its toll. As time passed, he was less active and stopped eating some of his favorite foods.

On May 3, 2021, he went into respiratory distress and died.

Slomo liked everyone, especially if you tucked him under your jacket where it was nice and warm. He would groom himself and then fall asleep in my lap. For his safety, he was never permitted to run free in the house, or at the center.

Some of his physical limitations may have been congenital, some may have been the result of metabolic bone disease. The person who found him fed him puppy formula for several days. Dog and cat nursing formulas available in pet stores are not healthy diets for small rodents.

They can cause calcium deficiencies that result in bone

deformities. Even a few days can cause problems. That might explain the crooked bones. I don't know what caused the neoteny.

Neoteny is retaining juvenile characteristics into adulthood. Slomo never stopped acting like a baby squirrel. He was two years old before he grew adult fur on his tail.

Over the years, I have tried to tame several disabled ground squirrels for our display cage. They always grow up. Not one will tolerate being held - except Slomo.

Given all his problems, he lived longer than expected, but not long enough.

We all miss him.



Slomo

John Burt

At three years old, Slomo grooms himself in my hand.

As an adult, he was half the size of a normal California ground squirrel, and he acted like a baby.

\*\*\*

## Supplies We Need

Paper Towels

Scrub Brushes

Puppy Pads

13 gal plastic garbage bags

Dishwashing Gloves (S & M)

Visit our Amazon Wish List for other ideas.

## Volunteers & Money

## Bald Eagle continued from page 1

fish, loving salmon, but also eat many other kinds of animals. They also scavenge.

Fortunately, the local game wardens had brought us illegal caught stripers, so we had food for the eagle.

The gripping power of an eagle's feet is many times greater than a human hand, and their talons are long, sharp, and strong.

Bald eagles begin building nests in mid-February. Eggs hatch from early April to early May, and the young fledge in late June or July. Parents continue feeding and protecting the young for another 6 weeks. As birds go, this is an incredibly long amount of time.

The nest is the largest of any bird in North America. They add sticks to it each year. Some nests are eight feet across and a dozen feet deep, weighing a ton or more. Eventually, the nest becomes unstable. It either blows apart in a storm or breaks the branches that support it. In the early 18th century, the bald eagle population was 300,000. But by the 1950's, there were only 412 nesting pairs in the 48 contiguous states due to DDT, habitat loss, and illegal shooting. Currently, there are close to ten thousand breeding pairs. Bald eagles are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and other state and federal laws.

Native Americans believe both bald and golden eagles to be sacred. Therefore, dead eagles are stored and given to federally recognized Native American tribes for religious ceremonies.

Contrary to popular legend, there is no evidence that Benjamin Franklin ever publicly supported the wild turkey rather than the bald eagle as a symbol of the United States.

He wrote a letter to his daughter in 1784, stating his personal distaste for the eagle's behavior that said, "For my own part I wish the bald eagle had not been chosen the representative of our Country. He is a bird of bad moral character. He does not get his living honestly.....besides he is a rank coward: The little kingbird, not bigger than a sparrow, attacks him boldly and drives him out of the district".

Our bald eagle is still recuperating. The injury to her hip was more serious than it first appeared. She still limps. We will give her plenty of time to recover but will transfer her to a zoo if she isn't releasable.

\*\*\*



Open an Amazon Smile account and designate the SWCC as your charity. Every time you buy something, they send us a little money at no charge to you.

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# Sadie the Black-Tailed Prairie Dog

By Donna Burt

One day, back in May, someone turned in a black-tailed prairie dog from Texas. The person who brought the prairie dog to us was not the person who brought it from Texas. Her name was Sadie.

Prairie dogs don't live in California. They don't live west of the Rocky Mountains. Although they are considered a kind of ground squirrel, they aren't anything like the ground squirrels who live in California. They are big. They have tiny, almost invisible ears and short tails. And their teeth are chisel-shaped, like a rabbit or rat. California ground squirrel's teeth are long and pointed, like daggers.

Sadie was friendly. She loved to be held. Obviously, the people who raised her did a fine job of taming her, but there may be more to it than that. I doubt that prairie dogs are inherently easy to tame.

Although prairie dogs are illegal in California, they are legal pets in Texas, where they are commercially bred for the pet trade. I'm making a guess here, but I bet the breeders breed for individuals that can be tamed.

Still, I wouldn't recommend one as a pet. Because it is spring, and we are short on cages, I took Sadie home. Although I have a bigger cage than the one she came in, she still needed to run free for several hours a day. Rolling in a giant exercise ball was fine, but if she escaped, she was rather destructive.

She was also quite demanding about being let out to roll, feed, be held, and so forth. She didn't use a litter box. And, she bit if frightened or upset.

Prairie dogs live in large colonies. They have complex social systems. Keeping a healthy one alone just seems wrong. So, we transferred her to a zoo that has a colony of prairie dogs. Now, she can run and play with other prairie dogs.

\*\*\*



Sadie

Donna Burt

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Summer 2021

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