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36710 Sand Creek Road  
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Visit [CritterCreek.org](http://CritterCreek.org) to see back issues of the Chronicle



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## CRITTER CREEK WILDLIFE STATION

# OPEN HOUSE

Saturday, September 21st - 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Sadly we announce the death of Shasta, our mountain lion, in the middle of May. He was only seven years old. Based on the information from the necropsy he died from a combination of age, weight, gastric ulcers, anemia, and heat exhaustion.



Everyone who has ever volunteered time up at Critter Creek will miss seeing him lounging in his cage.

### Donations just became easier!

Critter Creek now has a new option for you to join or renew your Circle of Supporters membership.

As part of the Combined Federal Campaign, Critter Creek can now take donations via internet. This service is free for most credit cards, ensuring that your entire donation goes to help wildlife. Visit our website: [crittercreek.org](http://crittercreek.org) and click on the Give Direct button.



Of course you can still fill out the membership form and mail it to us at 36710 Sand Creek Road, Squaw Valley, CA 93675.

**Critter Creek Chronicle**  
Animals for Education

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# Let Mother Nature Mother!

Each spring, we take in baby birds that really are not orphaned at all. They have fallen from their nest or the nest/tree has come down. In reality, the parents are often still around, feeding and caring for their young. For years we have been trying to encourage people to place the baby bird back into its nest. With the exception of the turkey vulture, birds have no sense of smell, so handling the baby bird has no effect on the parents. By returning the baby to its parents, people ensure the baby will get the best care. We can only do so much to replicate the parent's care. The quality of care is especially difficult with song birds. The parents work tirelessly bringing food to the nest every few minutes. It's impossible for rehabbers to duplicate that effort. The parents know instinctively what type of food the young needs, how warm to keep them, how much fluid needs to be in the food, etc.

We often get people wanting to bring an "orphaned" baby bird to us, who state that the parents are right outside their door going nuts. Crows, scrub jays, and woodpeckers are some of the most anxious parents, so it makes sense to get their young back to them. Baby ducks are another example of an often avoidable need for rehab. Mother ducks are diligent parents but they can be easily separated from their brood if provoked to fly away. People with pools need to patrol their backyards in an effort to prevent ducks from nesting there, unless the homeowner is committed to a couple of months of duck rearing. In a panic, people try to catch the ducklings only to have the mom fly away. Sometimes she will return if she can hear the ducklings peeping, but she is often very difficult to catch.

If the entire nest has fallen out of the tree, place it back near its original location. If the nest is the worse for wear after the fall, place the remains of it in an open box and tack the box near the original location. If the tree has been cut down, put the young in an open box and place the box in a nearby tree or tack it up high on the side of a nearby building. The parents are remarkably persistent at looking and listening for their young.



An elaborate nest replacement on a communication tower or even a simple cardboard box wedged in a tree can work



All of this effort to get the baby back to its parents does involve the person moving quickly to get the baby back in the proximity of the parents and involves time to monitor the situation. Without scaring the parents, the person needs to be able to observe the new nest site to make sure the parents find the young and are returning to feed it. Birds of prey also respond well to having their young returned to them. Monitoring owls is a bit of a challenge, but they often come in to feed their young just after dusk, so it is still possible to observe them. Placing the young in too exposed an area, can invite "mobbing" by smaller birds during the day, but with some artful camouflage, the nest can be disguised.

Fledging, a time when baby birds are first learning to fly, is one of the most vulnerable times for babies. Unfortunately some do get caught by dogs and cats. However, again these birds are not

orphans. The parents continue to feed them and prod them to keep flapping to get to higher ground or they urge them to seek cover under bushes. The process can take a few days but eventually the babies fly well enough to keep themselves out of danger. If homeowners are willing to endure the suspense, the birds are gone within a few days. This might involve keeping dogs and cats under control for those days. Bringing these fledglings to us doesn't mean we'll be successful. A fledgling isn't inclined to eat well and doesn't want to be confined. Letting the parents finish the job works the best.

This principle also applies to mammals. If a person runs across a baby fox, opossum, or raccoon, don't be so quick to assume that it is an orphan. These animals are pretty small when their parents encourage them to begin foraging on their own. Unless the mother is dead, the young is not an orphan. Deer is one of the hardest mammals for people to leave alone. When first born, a fawn cannot stay up with the herd. It is born with no scent, so the mother parks it in a safe place and returns twice a day to feed it. People get nervous seeing a fawn all day apparently abandoned by its mother when she is actually keeping it safe until it is strong enough to travel with the herd. Dogs often find and attack the young, so it is helpful to monitor pet dogs and if they do roust something, remove them to another area to give the young and parents a chance to find each other. If the youngster is injured then we do need to step in to get it medical care.

Currently in the field of wildlife rehabilitation, these practices now have a name Renesting and Reuniting. However for decades, rehabbers have had no desire to interfere with nature's parenting process. We try to let the parents work their magic. If the animal is truly an orphan we do all we can to fill-in (even blending meat to replicate a mother chewing food to regurgitate to her young). Raising wildlife is a time consuming and expensive process that all our volunteers at Critter Creek are committed to doing; however, it is best to keep the young with their parents at every opportunity.

## Fun Field Trip

As part of our educational mission, we encourage classes to visit Critter Creek. A third grade class from Centerville Elementary School came at the end of May. After the tour, they had lunch and then volunteered to do some painting for us. Forty third graders equipped with brushes and buckets of green wood stain might seem a bit scary, but they did an excellent job. We wish to thank them for their help and donations of cardboard, paper towels, linen, etc.

