



April 2010

### The Hitchhiker

Each and every day, the staff and volunteers at the Project Wildlife Care Center witness miracles, but on Friday, January 29, 2010, the most astounding “miracle” arrived at our door. That day, a call came in from 911. The operator informed us that a driver had hit a Red Tail Hawk with his car and wanted to bring the bird to our Care Center for treatment. After 911 transferred the call, the driver, Dan Cassidy, explained that the hawk had flown into his windshield and was now stuck in the crevice of the window and the visor. He asked for directions to the Care Center so we could help him get the bird out. “It happened on the 52 at Genesee heading towards La Jolla,” said Dan Cassidy, driver of the Toyota 4Runner who struck the hawk at 70mph. He was in full wing spread going sideways in mid-swoop to get something in the field when he got blindsided. I immediately drove to Scenic Drive and pulled over to call 911. When I got Project Wildlife’s information, I got out of my car and petted him and told him everything would be okay.”

Dan immediately headed to the Project Wildlife Care Center where our staff prepared for his arrival. We were unsure of what condition the hawk would be in; whether the hawk would survive the drive down the freeway or possibly wriggle free from his predicament. It was an anxious 15 minutes for everyone involved. Dan, however, was confident in his decision to get the hawk to us as quickly as possible, “I believe the fact that he was wedged in so tight is what saved him because he couldn’t fall out and injure himself further. With the wind, I thought he’d be okay on the drive since he’s used to that sort of thing while flying. I didn’t want to try and get him out and leave him on the side of the road in case he was really hurt and he would be prey to something else.”

Project Wildlife staff and volunteers were on standby outside the Care Center when Dan pulled up. “The hawk looked pretty bad, his wings were stuck out at odd angles and he had now not only dealt with the trauma of the crash, but driving on the highway to get to us,” said April Valentin, Manager of Animal Care. Dan was amazed at the immediate action of the Care Center staff, “When I got to Project Wildlife, everyone was waiting for me and the second I arrived they went to work. The staff were like paramedics working on a patient; incredibly fast and professional.”

After patient and meticulous efforts, the staff was able to dislodge the hawk from the windshield. To everyone’s disbelief, the hawk was miraculously without serious injuries. “The most amazing part was when he stood up ten minutes later like nothing had happened,” exclaimed Dan. After a quick examination by our staff, the hawk was transferred to our dedicated and talented Home Care rehabilitators for continued care. After one month of rehabilitation, the “Hitchhiker” as he came to be known amongst Project Wildlife staff and volunteers, was released on Friday, March 5, 2010 in Rose Canyon here in San Diego. Although Dan was unable to attend the release, he expressed his gratitude for everything that Project Wildlife did to help the hawk, “It’s made me feel great that Project Wildlife has continued to give me updates on the hawk’s progress and include me in the rehabilitation process. I am so happy the hawk was released, but disappointed I couldn’t be there to see it. It was certainly a miracle and it proves he was meant to live.”

Once again, Project Wildlife succeeds in its efforts to give local wildlife a second chance!