

CROW Case Of The Week:

# Eastern Screech Owl

by Emilie Alfino

An Eastern screech owl was found in the middle of the road on June 28 by William Egbert of Fort Myers as he headed home. "I was going down a side street by my house and he was just lying by the road with his wing sticking out," Egbert said. "I thought maybe something was wrong with his wing." Egbert drove by at first but when he checked his rear view mirror, it looked like the owl was having trouble, so he backed up and blocked traffic to prevent the little bird from getting hit.

Using a towel in his truck, Egbert scooped up the tiny owl, laid him in his lap and drove home. He called a 24-hour veterinarian, who asked whether he could take care of the bird overnight – which he could – and then drop him off at the Eastside Animal Hospital on Palm Beach Boulevard, one of CROW's drop-off points, in the morning. "I put him in a tupperware bin with a couple of towels," Egbert said. "He was just a little guy so I put him in my lap. He was a little listless. He was a cute little guy."

Dr. Amber McNamara observed that this owl didn't have a lot of external trauma, no bruising was noted, and there were no obvious wounds. "Owls are one species whose anatomy allows us to readily see in their eyes and ears, which isn't true of most birds. There was no blood, which was good. But he was essentially recumbent, just lying down," Dr. Amber said. Given where the little bird was found, the doctor believed he was most likely hit by a car.

"It can be difficult, especially with adult owls, to determine if they're just playing dead or really injured," Dr. Amber continued. "They're very good at it, even the babies. They'll just fall over. They instinctively know how to do it because it's their defense mechanism."

If the bird is playing dead, though, it's usually obvious by the next morning. That held true with this owl, as staff could see he had some pretty major head trauma. He didn't want to stand and would sit in very awkward positions, sometimes with one wing sticking out at a strange and uncomfortable angle. His head would droop and he wasn't standing. "We treated him like many of our trauma patients, with several types of pain medications, arnica and some fluids," Dr. Amber explained. "He was very dull for about five days."

The pain medication was continued and on the sixth night he ate a mouse. Even though he really wasn't as mentally aware as he could have been, he was alert enough to eat. Dr. Amber hoped that showed some progress.

The owl continued that behavior for another couple of days, not as mentally aware as he could have been and not reacting to stimulus the way he should have been – but he was eating, which was very much in his favor.

"We could feel his legs getting a little stronger now that he was eating even though he still wasn't standing," Dr. Amber said. "We kept him in a small carrier for about a week. Then, since he was eating well, we decided to move him into a cage and offer him a perch for a change of scenery. Within 24 hours, he was up on a perch, which was great."

The owl continued to get stronger and more alert over the next three days so his medications were discontinued but he was kept inside. Then on June 17 he went outside to an aviary, where he is now.

"He looks great: alert, upright – he really has made a tremendous improvement," said Dr. Amber. "I think he's probably about ready to be released."

Dr. Amber believes this owl suffered some traumatic brain injury, probably from a car accident. "We didn't see any outward wounds but it took almost two weeks before he was mentally and physically 'with it,'" she said.

Often CROW staff has no idea not only how an animal was



**Eastern Screech Owl now flies freely in his aviary, brought back from a traumatic brain injury by CROW staff**

injured but even precisely what the animal's injuries are, unless someone sees it happen. In this case, it was a likely assumption that the owl was hit by a car – but still just an assumption. "It's really hard and we do our best to make them as comfortable as we can and hope we can give them the time they need to improve," Dr. Amber said. "When you start to see the little improvements the animal needs to make, that's what you're aiming for."

*CROW (Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife, Inc.) is a non-profit wildlife hospital providing veterinary care for native and migratory wildlife from the Gulf Coast of Florida. The hospital accepts patients seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mail donations to PO Box 150, Sanibel, FL 33957. Call 472-3644 or visit: [www.crowclinic.org](http://www.crowclinic.org).✧*

