



The 'horns' on the great horned owl are simply tufts of feathers



The great horned owl's wingspan is between 40 and 60 inches

CROW Case Of The Week:

Great Horned Owl

by Emilie Alfino

A great horned owl arrived at CROW August 17 from a very odd place: Coconut Point Ford. He could have been looking for his friends the Falcon and the Thunderbird, but Ford doesn't make them anymore. Clearly, the owl needed help.

"We were concerned about a head injury," said Dr. Jess Brugler of CROW. "He seemed a little out of it. When he came in he was in good bodily condition but his attitude was a little depressed. He wasn't quite as feisty as we would like."

Physical examination revealed the owl had some blood around his mouth, bruising on his left eyelid, and abrasions on his feet. He was given some pain medication and the herb arnica, which helps with stress and bleeding. CROW uses arnica a lot on trauma patients, according to Dr. Jess. Then the owl was put in a cage with a perch.

Staff offered him a couple of mice but he didn't eat them. A staff member suggested trying something a little larger, like a chick. "Sometimes a mouse is too small to arouse their interest," Dr. Jess said.

The bird seemed fairly alert when a chick was put in his cage the second day, and that did the trick: he ate the whole thing.

By the second day he was eating well and was even more alert. "When you looked at him, he would puff up like a big feather duster and bob his head and make clacking sounds with his beak," said Dr. Jess. "He was definitely improving but was still quieter than I would like to see."

On his third night, he was taken to one of CROW's large flight cages to see how he would fare. "We put him on a perch and he didn't want to go anywhere. He just jumped down," said Dr. Jess. "It seemed maybe his left wing wasn't working well. But it was hard to catch him to check him over, and we didn't want to stress him anymore. So we left him out there."

The next day the owl was flying short distances but still not using his left wing properly. Staff observed, though, that most of the time when they checked on him, he was up on the higher perches. How could he possibly get there without flying? "Great horned owls are nocturnal, so we didn't see him fly, but we knew he had to be flying fairly well to get up to those high perches.

About one week later, someone caught him flying well and using his left wing. Combined with the fact that he'd been eating like a champ – absolutely everything that was put out for him – he went home August 28. And bought a Ford Fiesta.

"We took him back to a big wooded area behind Coconut Point Ford, which is probably where he came from in the first place," Dr. Jess said. "He probably was hit by a car; these owls go down in ditches for food and then come flying out and drivers don't see them."

One again, CROW facilitated a self-healing case with a happy outcome.

CROW (Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife, Inc.) is a nonprofit 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. Donations can be mailed to PO Box 150, Sanibel, FL 33957. Call 472-3644 or visit: www.crowclinic.org.✧

