

CROW Case Of The Week:

## Baby Squirrel Season

by Emilie Alfino

In the area surrounding Sanibel Island, squirrel breeding season usually lasts from late summer through the fall. This last year it never really stopped, according to Dr. Jess Brugler. "There hasn't been a time over the past year that we haven't had a baby squirrel here at CROW," she said.

The clinic currently has 32 squirrels in its care, from tiny pink newborns with their eyes still closed to some that are almost ready to be released. Unfortunately, breeding season for squirrels coincides with tree trimming season, and that's how CROW gets most of its squirrels – when the nest falls from the tree. "We had one where the trimmer cut the nest and the baby was injured by the trimming tool itself."

Occasionally people find squirrels that have fallen out of the nest and they'll bring them to CROW. A lot of times in these cases, unless there's an immediate danger of a dog or cat eating them, the mother squirrel will take care of her babies, according to Dr. Jess. "It's best if they're left alone for a while. If they come out of the nest and their eyes are open, they may be just exploring. It's always best to watch for a couple of hours and see if the babes are active, and not immediately jump on them as though something is wrong," Dr. Jess explained. "If you know where the nest is, you can try to put them back in, but the nests are usually high. Always check your trees before trimming – I can't stress that enough."

Most of the squirrels CROW treats come from Fort Myers and Cape Coral.

"When they come in, if they're really little and pink, we'll start feeding them with a feeding tube. You have to be careful; it can be a dangerous thing but that's the best way to feed them," said Dr. Jess. "They need hydration and most of the time we'll need to give them liquid under the skin. We start with electrolytes and then move to a squirrel milk."

When they start to get a little bigger, the babies are weaned onto a nipple on the end of a syringe. CROW has actually had to have some trained volunteers come in specifically to feed the babies.

"We usually go from baby bird season right to baby squirrel season – they overlapped this year so we needed a lot of volunteers," said Dr. Jess. "When they're that little, you need to stimulate them to urinate and defecate. Caring for them is very labor intensive, but it's very rewarding to see them grow up and get their bushy tails."

Dr. Jess's main message to everyone is not to pick up baby squirrels right away, unless the cat brings them to you or if there

are visible injuries. "Remember, the mother is usually somewhere watching them," she explained. "A lot of baby squirrels that come in have full bellies and have been well taken care of. If so, we will just raise them up and get them big and fat and healthy. But it's hard to return them to where they came from."

"They're absolutely precious. I love them."

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) ✨



Now old enough to nurse from a syringe fitted with a nipple



This newborn hasn't even opened its eyes yet

