

CROW Case Of The Week:

Peninsula Cooter

by Emilie Alfino

An adult female Peninsula cooter found by a Cape Coral man arrived at CROW July 18. She was languishing, bleeding, on a service road at Southwest Florida International Airport, suffering from a number of serious wounds from being hit by a car. The man who found and rescued her, a rock-and-roll aficionado, called her Zeppelin while she was in his care.

She arrived still bleeding from the top of her shell and from her right front foot, according to Dr. Jess Brugler, who is filling in at CROW since Dr. Amber's departure. "She had some shell fractures along the middle of the top of her shell. The most interesting thing is she was missing her foot and that was an old injury. That's why it was bleeding – scar tissue is usually not as strong as the original," Dr. Jess said. "So here she has been living out in the wild with basically only three legs and seemingly doing great until she decided to cross in the middle of the road."

A turtle missing a limb is usually able to adapt pretty well. They use their back legs for steering, diving, and digging their nests; the front legs are basically for helping them propel themselves, according to Dr. Jess. This turtle did have a stump, making it a bit easier for her than if she had lost her whole leg. "She probably lost her foot when it got tangled in some fishing line or something, or maybe something bit it off," said Dr. Jess. The vet's best guess, though, was it was a fishing line that took off the turtle's foot.

The turtle also had a lot of bruising and road rash, as one would imagine after being hit by a car on an airport service road. "Her shell was all scuffed up, especially on the bottom," Dr. Jess explained. "It did seem to indicate she had been clipped by the car and skidded, but I can't really estimate how far. She may have just spun on her belly."

The cooter was given pain medication right away. "That's a pretty painful injury for these guys – that's bone being broken," said Dr. Jess.

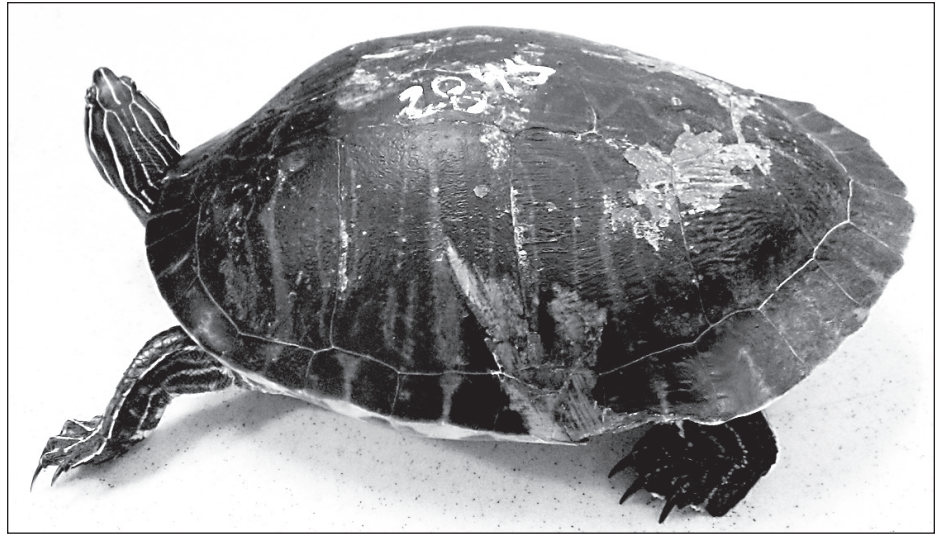
Staff cleaned her up with saline solution and applied antibiotic cream and a bandage. Antibiotics were also administered, as Dr. Jess was worried about dirt in the wound because it was a complete fracture.

The bandage stayed on for 11 days and the turtle was already healing well enough to go without a bandage and switch to golden yellow salve to cover the wound. She had been soaking in a shallow tub to keep her bandages dry. Now on golden yellow, she could go in the water, and she started going deeper.

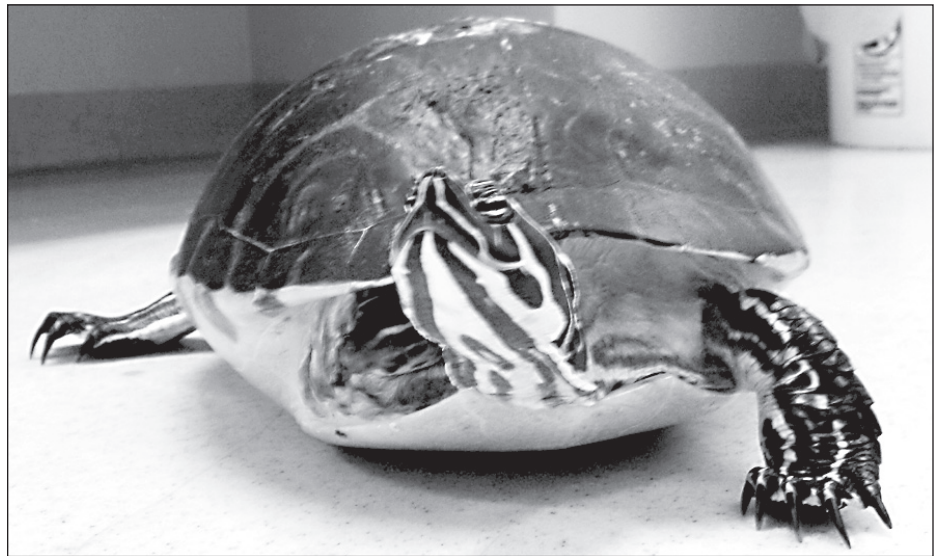
"The funny thing about turtles with shell injuries is they tend to float," Dr. Jess explained. "They get kind of an air bubble in there. It takes some time for them to regain the ability to go back underwater."

August 9 was a big day for the cooter – she started going outside in one of CROW's sea turtle tanks. For three days she continued to float but could steer against the current and get around very well. "Just three days later I went out there and she was walking on the bottom of the pool," Dr. Jess said, obviously pleased.

Peninsula cooter, CROW patient number 2846, formerly dubbed Zeppelin by her rescuer, was released in one of the ponds in the Bailey Tract, where you can now sometimes hear the faint



The wounds are well on their way to being healed, but it's clear that she took a beating on the road



This Peninsula cooter's lost foot was an old injury that made her more vulnerable when she was hit by a car

strains of *Stairway to Heaven* emanating from the water.

"She had the best personality," said Dr. Jess. "She was a very curious turtle and I'm so glad she's back where she belongs."

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.*

