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CROW Case Of The Week:

Two Laughing Gulls



by Emilie Alfino

The Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife deals with many recurring problems, and the cases of two laughing gulls illustrate a major problem that a simple change in human

behavior could solve.

Laughing gulls are not the largest of the gull family but are smaller birds that can be seen running around on the beach. The males have black heads in the summer, which is their breeding plumage.

This gull came to CROW from Lover's Key in Fort Myers on September 17. "Someone called and told us a bird had fishing line hanging out of his mouth – a telltale sign there's a hook somewhere. We always hope the hook is still attached to the line," explained Wildlife Rehabilitator Robin Bast.

X-rays were taken and sure enough, a fish hook could clearly be seen in the gull's digestive tract, meaning he would need surgery.

The day before surgery, the bird received pre-operative care in the form of two different antibiotics, pain medica-



The hook the first gull swallowed is obvious in this radiograph. Note the size of the hook compared to the size of the bird

tions and subcutaneous fluids. The following day, the 18th, he had surgery. The surgery was performed by one of CROW's relief veterinarians, Dr. David Nichols, a member of CROW's board of directors.

"The hook was in the ventriculus, which is part of the stomach in birds," Bast said. "Birds have a couple of sections to their digestive tracts. This is one of them and comparable to the stomach in humans." Bast explained that birds have some extra parts to their digestive tracts compared to humans. The ventriculus, where the hook was found in this case, is a "second stomach" that does the mechanical grinding and breakdown of food. The proventriculus comes before the ventriculus, and is the "first stomach" where the gastric acids and

secretions start the chemical breakdown of food.

The hook was surgically removed and the gull made it through the night – an important milestone in this kind of injury. "Once you get the hook out, that's not the end of the road; that's not the hardest part," said Bast. "He still had a long way to go."

The incision looked good the next day and staff took precautions to "go easy" on the gull's stomach. He was tube-fed fish slurry. He remained on two antibiotics, pain meds, and subcutaneous fluids as long as he required supportive post-surgery care.

About five days after his surgery, the gull started eating solid food in the form of smelt and super worms. Still, antibiotics were continued through the 26th or



The radiograph of the second bird shows almost the same circumstances – a hook in his "stomach" that must be surgically removed to save his life

about 10 days post-surgery. His sutures were removed two days after completion of antibiotics.

Two days after finishing all medications, the gull headed outside to CROW's shorebird cage during the day for what Bast calls "day camp." But because of the location of his surgery, the doctor had to pluck feathers on the bird's abdomen, so staff was worried about the gull getting cold if he couldn't thermoregulate properly. He was taken inside at night and returned to the ICU to avoid any problems maintaining his body temperature.

"Then we basically were feeding him, cleaning him, giving him supportive care until his feathers grew back in," said Bast.

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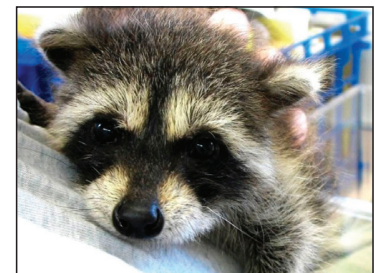
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