

CROW Case Of The Week:

Eastern Spotted Skunk



by Emillie Alfino

CROW (Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife) received a phone call November 14 that a skunk was in someone's yard in Lehigh Acres with some sort of bottle

stuck on his head. The callers weren't comfortable approaching the animal to contain it – and they were right. "Generally you shouldn't be approaching any wildlife without proper instruction, especially skunks because they are a rabies vector species – meaning they are more commonly known to carry that disease," explained CROW Wildlife Rehabilitator Robin Bast. "That doesn't mean all skunks have rabies. If possible, only someone who has had pre-exposure shots should handle skunks. Usually anyone who works in the veterinary field has had these shots." There was enough coverage at the clinic that day that Bast was able to hop in the van and travel to Lehigh Acres. "When I got there this skunk was so scared because he couldn't see very well through the bottle or turn his head



Eastern spotted skunk recuperating in his cage

and act like he normally would," said Bast. "I threw a towel over him and put him in a carrier. At this point, he had sprayed. We couldn't get the bottle off his head, so I gently poked holes in it so he could breathe, being careful not to poke him in the face."

Bast put her new patient in the increasingly pungent van and drove an hour back to CROW. The students who were off that day in the student housing said they could smell the van approaching.

Once in the clinic, staff could see that, luckily, the bottle – it was a Gatorade bottle – wasn't very tight and hadn't been there very long. They used mineral oil around the skunk's neck as lubricant and slowly and gently twisted the bottle off his head. "The bottle came off nicely," Bast said. "Unfortunately he



The skunk being transported for release

decided to spray again at that point." A physical examination revealed the skunk had only a small abrasion on his neck, which is how Bast knew the bottle hadn't been there long. Because of the difficulties involved in handling skunks, he was cleaned and put in a cage downstairs in the adult mammal room, where staff observed him for a week to make sure his wound didn't get infected.

The skunk was released on November 19. "I got to do the release," Bast said. "He took off like a shot." He was released in Alva rather than Lehigh Acres where he was found. "We didn't want to release him in an area with a lot of development nearby. In Alva he'll have lots of wooded habitat, away from Gatorade bottles," Bast said.

Quite possibly, the skunk was trying to get into the bottle to lick the rem-

nants of its contents. CROW staff has seen it all – animals that've gotten into peanut butter jars and all sorts of things. "They're not able to realize the consequences," Bast emphasized. "This is an important reminder to pick up your trash and the plastic rings around soda cans."

The staffers in the van and those sprayed during the exam washed up in a mixture of tomato juice, white vinegar, and baking soda – it helps, but not 100 percent. "The clinic still smells like skunk, and the van will smell for a bit longer," Bast laughed. I had to give a presentation to a high school biology class the next morning, and I had to apologize to the students in the front row. I told them a skunk thanked me by spraying me – just one of the hazards

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