

CROW Case of the Week: Florida Water Snake

by Brian Johnson

Island real estate agent Susan Dunn was on her way to preview property with “Red” Moran on September 27 when they saw a snake broadsided by an oncoming vehicle on Casa Ybel Road. Dunn, whose family operates Gatorama and is a lifelong reptile fan, didn’t think twice about stopping her car in the road and jumping out to help the creature.

“He was writhing around, I thought he would die,” said Dunn. “But when I picked him up -- I caught him behind the head -- he wrapped himself around my arm and I knew his spine was okay.” She put him in a plastic Publix bag and handed the package to Red, who was sitting in the front seat. “Let’s take him to CROW!” said Red, who held the bag in her lap on the way to the clinic. Dunn told her the snake was not poisonous.



“Most snakes are harmless,” she said. “They are good for the environment and important to the food chain.” Dr. Amber took the snake from Red at CROW and examined him. “There was blood in his left eye, which was noticeable swollen,” she said. “There was blood in his mouth and he was breathing heavily. He did not appear to have vision from either eye.”



Staff soaked him a half-inch of water and provided him with a heat lamp. They gave him arnica for trauma, and kept him in an incubator with a temperature of 92 degrees overnight. “His eye was less swollen but still filled with blood in the morning,” said McNamara. “I spritzed him with water, which the snakes often like, but he didn’t like it and went crawling up the side of the aquarium. He was much more reactive on the second day.” The snake was offered crickets and small fish, which he declined, on Days 2-4.

On Day 5 he was feeling well enough to eat a smelt. “It was obvious that he had vision in his right eye, but there was still quite a bit of blood in his left eye,” said McNamara.

With the snake eating on his own and a very low-maintenance patient, staff will simply allow him the time he needs for the blood to resolve and to recover his vision in his left eye. McNamara said it could take as much as a month or more. He has no fractures or other injuries.

In the meantime the water snake is spending about two hours in the bathtub each day and the balance hiding under his towel in his 85-degree reptarium. The heat lamp is positioned so that he has a warmer zone and a cooler zone to choose from. For now, he mostly prefers the warm zone.

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