

## **CROW Case of the Week: Magnificent Frigatebird**

by Brian Johnson



If you have ever seen a Magnificent Frigatebird, it won't take long to see they weren't built to win the Kentucky Derby or set any land speed records. With giant wing spans and little legs attached below their bodies, almost as rudders, these birds are designed to soar in the air. They glide high above the sea, drifting on the wind currents and hardly seeming to flap their wings at all.

At CROW, the anatomy of these birds creates an extra challenge for Dr. Amber McNamara and the clinic staff. They have trouble walking on their little feet, and it's virtually impossible to test their flight because they can't catch an updraft of wind from the floor of even CROW's largest outdoor cages. On November 2 CROW

received an adult female Magnificent Frigatebird from Fort Myers Beach. The creature has been caught up in fishing line off the coast, and numerous people had seen and called about her. Finally Kendall Fels succeeded in capturing the Magnificent Frigate and bringing her to shore.

The 1.43-kilogram bird had previously had a hook in her wing and line entanglement. "It's hard to evaluate their flapping and symmetry because they are so big," said Dr. Amber. "But I was able to feel along the length of her wing with my fingers, and there was no swelling or lacerations. She was just beaten down and exhausted from the struggle with the fishing line." Staff placed her in a double-wide cage in ICU and provided her with fluids and pain medication. She wasn't interested in eating any fish the next so staff tube-fed her fluids and the Chinese herb Four Gentlemen. Later they gave her a high-calorie carnivore formula. Dr. Amber said only about 25% of the frigatebirds will eat in captivity.

For the first three days the bird's wings flapped unevenly or drooped to the side. There were no fractures or major injuries, but she had enough soft tissue trauma to effect her flapping strength. Staff was anxious to turn her around as quickly as possible and get back to the wild before she damaged her wings in the cage or began to lose weight.

Fortunately, by the end of a week, her strength improved, and she could flap her wings in a strong and symmetrical manner; Dr. Amber gave the green light to let her go.

They took her to the bridge at Blind Pass, which connects Sanibel to Captiva. With the water flowing from Gulf to Bay, CROW staff members Nikki Talianko and Zac Johnson held her out, and let her flap and catch some wind. The bird took off out of their hands and successfully flew away



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**P.O. Box 150. Sanibel, FL 33957**

**(239) 472-3644, EXT: 2**

**For additional questions E-mail: [development@crowclinic.org](mailto:development@crowclinic.org)**