

## CROW Case of the Week: **Great-Horned Owls**

by **Brian Johnson**



On January 24 Mike Boesenberg found two Great-Horned Owl babies on the ground, at the bottom of a pine tree, on his large tract of land in Lehigh Acres in Fort Myers. He was not sure how long they had been there. Familiar with the wildlife on his land, Mike had first seen the parents of the owls about two years ago. He told CROW staff the owls had taken over the nest of a Mangrove Fox Squirrel.

CROW Veterinarian Dr. PJ Deitschel asked him to bring the babies into the clinic.

One weighed 565 grams while the smaller one just 380 grams. The primary concern was internal injuries from the fall from the 35-foot nest site. The larger baby owl stood up and adopted an aggressive posture while the smaller one hunkered down on his hocks. CROW gave them fluids and a tiny bit of food and put them in a cage overnight.

The following morning the staff was pleased to find the baby raptors BAR (bright, alert and responsive). Staff gave them a small breakfast and the birds spent a comfortable day at CROW.

On Tuesday staff contacted the finder to see if the parents were still circling the area. Mike said they were continuing to search for their lost offspring. As the babies had shown no signs of internal trauma, Dr. PJ gave the green light to send them back to Lehigh, entrusting them to Cat, the hospital's "premiere" nest builder and tree climber. Cat gathered up sticks and branches from the CROW property and grabbed an extension ladder. As a volunteer's plans changed at the last moment, Cat recruited her mother, Scarlett Fox, who lives in the area, to help her with the release. "She was happy to come and see the babies and what I do," said Cat. "She's the best ladder-holder ever!"

Mike showed her the pine tree, and Cat climbed up and found the squirrel nest. "It was no bigger than a mockingbird nest!" she said. Deciding the owls needed a larger home, she went to work constructing new lodging for them. Using palm fronds and the material she brought from CROW, she wove a spacious nest that would give them ample room. She put the nest in a nearby palm tree, securing it in such a way that they would be protected from sun and rain and still give their mother easy entry and exit. "It was one of the best nests I ever made," said Cat. "The mama owl watched me the whole time."



She carried the babies up the palm tree in her backpack so she could have her hands free, then deposited them in the nest. She made several return trips up the ladder to soften the floor of the nest with pine needles and other brush. The babies settled in immediately and kept low and out of sight.

Cat returned on Monday, February 15 to check on their progress. "They were right where I left them," she said. "I could see them both from the ground. They are starting to get flight feathers and standing tall. The smaller one is catching up in size. They will probably be fledged in about two weeks."

If you would like to contribute to CROW in its extraordinary mission, please send your check to:

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