

**CROW Case of the Week: Gopher Tortoise**  
by Brian Johnson



On October 25, 2009 members of the Santana family were at their home in Alva when their young labrador retriever came bounding into the yard with a baby gopher tortoise in his mouth. They were able to rescue the little 500-gram creature and contact CROW. The tortoise became Patient #3660.

"The tortoise was about the size of my hand -- that is, the size of a sandwich," said CROW Vet Dr. Amber McNamara. "There were punctures in his carapace, and the cranial end of his plastron was fractured in four places. There were pieces of shell missing around his left shoulder."

Staff gave him pain medication and antibiotics and began to clean away the grass, dirt and other debris. However, they had to be careful of the puncture wounds, which may have penetrated as deep as his lungs. "These can be life-threatening injuries," said Dr. Amber. The tiny tortoise spent the night in an incubator in ICU. Staff covered his wounds with bandages.

"He was quiet the first 24 hours, but after that he became quite active," said Dr. Amber. "He did not want to sit still for his dressing changes." Staff soaked the turtle in a tub every other day, and kept him in a warm environment while managing his wounds and fractures.

On November 11 he made the trip with the other animals to the new hospital; he is now one of a small number of patients who made the crossing from the old hospital, and is a little bit of walking history.



The tortoise spent 7-8 weeks in bandages. "We we often took him out to the lettuce garden (a 6-foot x 3-foot structure), which he really enjoyed – it served as his own private suite," said Dr. Amber. "Many of the tortoises like to sleep off their injuries and stay hunkered down inside the clinic, but this one liked to wander around. He has been a mover and a shaker from Day 2."

The intrepid little tortoise is nearing release now. He still sleeps in the reptile room in the hospital, but he will soon spend evenings in an outdoor cage to get acclimated to evening temperatures. "He had a lot of trauma for a little guy, but he's doing great and we're hopeful for a spring release," said Dr. Amber.

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

Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife, Inc.  
P.O. Box 150. Sanibel, FL 33957  
(239) 472-3644, EXT: 2

For additional questions E-mail: [crowdvlpmnt@aol.com](mailto:crowdvlpmnt@aol.com)