

CROW Case of the Week: Laughing Gull by Brian Johnson



Over the years the staff at Tarpon Bay Explorers has rescued herons, pelicans and many other tropical birds from the mangrove estuaries. The latest rescue came on July 19 when customers at Tarpon Bay alerted the staff that there was a Laughing Gull covered in fishing line. The trio of Jenna Fulghum, Robbie Brown and Steve Yetsko went out to help the bird, who was walking futilely in a circle. “We threw a cast net over him, and he was so weak it was easy to just grab him with a towel,” said Jenna. “We always try to help the birds and get them to CROW.

Recently we even had a water cooter in the bay.”

Brown drove the gull down SanCap Road to CROW.

“He was all tangled up,” said Dr. Amber McNamara. “The fishing line was wrapped around his head and neck and both wings. When we finally got it all off there was a piece of line coming from his mouth.”

So what do you do when you’ve got a bird who almost certainly has a hook in his stomach but is not stabilized yet for surgery? Well, you tape the piece of line coming out of his mouth to his neck/shoulder area to keep him from swallowing the line or pulling on the hook. Staff gave the gull injectable pain medication, fluids and Yunnan Paiyuo for trauma and put him in a cage overnight. At 7:30 a.m. the next morning they prepped him for surgery, put him under anesthesia and took a radiograph of his stomach. The X-ray, developed in a matter of minutes, showed two hooks. “One was pretty big, and the other was smaller,” said Dr. McNamara. “It was good the hooks had not lodged in his throat – the worst spot is in the esophagus at the level of the heart.”

McNamara made an incision in the skin, cut through the abdominal muscle wall, and opened up the stomach. She had selected the right spot and was happy that the hook was located just where she expected it. “Their stomach is the size of a grape,” she said. “As soon as I made the incision it came right out...this was a pretty lucky bird, sometimes the hooks get twisted around or poke through the stomach lining.”

It took about 45 minutes to remove both hooks and put three sutures in his skin. He woke up from the anesthesia 15 minutes later and was soon standing up. Staff gave him more pain meds and let him rest for the remainder of the day in ICU.

“The next morning he readily ate a tiny smelt,” said Dr. McNamara. “He did great over the next week. He ate scrambled eggs, soaked dog chow, insects and smelt. Staff also gave him Chinese herbs to aid the healing process.”

On July 28 he flapped his wings and got some lift as they weighed him on the scale in the clinic. That afternoon staff transferred him, with another gull, to an outdoor flight cage.

“We will leave it up to him when he is ready to go – I’m optimistic it will be soon” said Dr. McNamara.

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) 395-0050

For additional questions E-mail: crowdvlpmnt@aol.com