

CROW Case of the Week: **Great Blue Heron** by Brian Johnson



On November 8 CROW received the first of a series of calls about a Great Blue Heron flying around The Landings, a residential neighborhood in Fort Myers. "When we saw a cord wrapped around his beak, we knew he was in trouble," said John Grande, one of the callers. The bird was so well-flighted that it was impossible for any of his would-be benefactors to capture him. Grande discussed the situation with the clinic's receptionists as well as Tom Allen, a CROW volunteer with a great deal of expertise in capturing wildlife. "When Tom puts his mind to getting an animal rescued, he gets it done," said CROW Veterinarian Dr. PJ Deitschel.

Grande generously offered to pay for a Mist Net, a specialized net used by conservation agencies who capture and place bands on birds. The threads are invisible to the human eye past five feet. CROW, with the proper licensing credentials, ordered the Mist Net, and the rescue operation moved into its next phase. On December 2, when the Mist Net arrived, Allen met Grande at The Landings and together they put the plan

in motion. Grande took them to one of the bird's favorite haunts near a lake, where they stretched the net between two stakes, creating a target zone measuring twenty-feet wide by eight-feet tall.

That was the easy part. Now, how would they get the heron to go into it?

The two walked the grounds at The Landings, and within the hour spotted the creature.

"We found him at one of the lakes, and then we chased him from lake to lake," said Grande. "He could fly very well." The two men ran on either side of the lakes to steer the Great Blue in the direction of the net. Grande waved his arms, discouraging the bird to come in his direction. At last, as Grande was out of breath, the bird flew unknowingly into the nearly invisible net, which collapsed around him. The Great Blue swooned into the water, and Grande dashed in after him. He got hold of his beak and pulled his body out of the water. Allen came up behind with a sock and slipped it over the bird's eyes. "It worked out absolutely perfect," said Grande. "I can't tell you how elated I felt to see him fly into the net. I thought, this is wonderful, we got him."

The 24-day seige had ended, and amazingly enough, the bird was still in pretty good shape.

They took him to Coral Veterinary Clinic, where two CROW volunteers picked him up and drove him to Sanibel Island. "It's beyond comprehension how he could have lasted that long with the cord around his beak," said Dr. PJ. "It was wound very tight. Perhaps it had been looser at an earlier point. The bird was feisty as could be -- very vocal -- and was not happy to be here."

By now, one can imagine, the Great Blue had had enough of these strange events.

CROW staff gave him a sedative to relax him while they removed the cord, which was imbedded in the serrated edges inside of his beak. They noticed a gash with a scab under his right wing.

They put him in the spacious walk-in cage, where he "rested the entire night without a peep." In the morning, though, as the sedation wore off, the Great Blue made his wishes known.

"This bird was up, feisty, full of life," said Dr. PJ. "He was ready to go."

The receptionist called volunteers Chuck and Nancy Runta, explaining they had a volatile Great Blue Heron who needed to go back to the wild at once.

The Runtas came over to CROW immediately. On the way to The Landings, Chuck drove while Nancy held the bird, eyes covered, in her lap.

Grande, who had been called by CROW, was waiting for them. They released him together.

"It was wonderful to see him fly across the lake, put his head in the water, and then shake his beak," said Grande. "He looks absolutely stunning, his plumage is fabulous. We see him behind our house every day, walking around."

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

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