

CROW Case Of The Week:

Short-Tailed Hawk



by Bob Petcher

The short-tailed hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*) is a small tropical hawk that is uncommon in Florida and even rarer in other parts of the country. In fact, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology refers to it as "one of the rarest and least-studied birds in the United States." They breed mostly and live mainly in Central America and South America.

Short-tailed hawks do not like to be in open areas much. They would rather be perching in hidden areas and soaring out of observers' eyesight when hunting. After prey is spotted, short-tailed hawks make steep free fall dives to catch mainly small birds perched on treetops.

These hawks are closely related to red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks, but can have two plumages - clear and dark. Dark ones are more frequent in Florida.

At CROW, a juvenile short-tailed hawk was admitted from a Cape Coral golf course after being found lying down and unable to fly. Veterinarians noted that the patient had moderate paraparesis and was unable to stand. After a physical exam, radiographs and bloodwork, veterinarians did not notice any obvious signs of trauma or

any fractured bones, but suspected the paraparesis may be the result of a spinal trauma.

"Paraparesis is the medical term used to describe weakening or partial paralysis of the legs," said Dr. Robin Bast, CROW staff veterinarian. "Radiographs showed no evidence of spinal fractures, but severe soft tissue swelling can result in compression of nerves resulting in decreased mobility of the affected limbs."

The patient is continuing to receive physical therapy every day.

"Physical therapy involves putting each joint in the legs through normal range of motion since the bird is not strong enough to do this itself," said Dr. Bast. "For the legs, this is often done in a bicycling motion."

Since being admitted on March 8, the patient has shown slight improvements in its ability to grip and use its legs.

"Spinal trauma can cause temporary or permanent damage. At this point, the hawk is making gradual improvements," said Dr. Bast. "It is still too early to tell if it will regain enough function to be able to survive in the wild again."

After a few more days of physical therapy, overall prognosis remains guarded.

"The hawk can now hock-sit and occasionally is able to stand for a few minutes at a time," said Dr. Bast. "Although this is an improvement, it is too early to tell if it will fully recover from its injuries."

CROW (Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife, Inc.) is a non-profit wildlife hospital providing veterinary care for



Patient #19-0543 is still undergoing physical therapy in hopes that it will fully recover from paraparesis photo by Brian Bohman

native and migratory wildlife from our local area. The hospital accepts patients seven days a week from 8 a.m.

to 5 p.m. Mail donations to P.O. Box 150, Sanibel, FL 33957. Call 472-3644 or visit www.crowclinic.org ✪