

“These Boots Where Made For HEALING!”

Rebecca Jurena

On November 6 of 2006, two hunters came back from the woods of Sullivan with something rather unexpected in tow; an adult great horned owl which they had found near their tree stand, unable to fly. The owl came to the Wildlife In Need Center in pretty rough shape: very underweight, dehydrated, full of parasitic flat flies, and with one very stiff and swollen toe on the left foot.

Due to her malnourished state, she was tube-fed fluids for the first few days before being offered solid foods. After roughly one week of being tube-fed in combination with handfed solid foods, the owl finally began to eat on her own once again, and was becoming livelier by the day! After addressing the owl's nutritional status, our focus turned to the stiff and swollen toe. The innermost forward-facing toe and surrounding area of the left foot were very swollen, yet quite cold to the touch. An x-ray at the Wales Vet Clinic revealed no fractures, just soft tissue damage. After several days of antibiotics and medicated-foot-rubs, the affected area began to soften and warm up. At this point, the ever-so-great routine of pus purging began!! Twice a day, the owl would have as much exudate expressed from the injured foot as possible, but no matter what, the abscessed toe and foot didn't seem to be improving.



(left) Radiograph of abscessed foot; (right) Water noodle boot; (bottom) The owl's bandaged feet post operation

stabilize, but was only slightly improving. At this time, volunteer wildlife veterinarian Dr. Holly Pollard was contacted to examine the owl and offer her expert opinion. An orthopedic specialist, Dr. Pollard has worked hands-on with raptors and dealt with an assortment of leg and wing injuries. Without further delay, Dr. Pollard performed surgery on the owl's foot the following week to excise the abscess. The infection had greatly deteriorated the bone in the

innermost digit, which was then amputated, but the crucial hallux (rear-facing toe) still seemed viable. Raptors are able to survive in the wild with certain toe amputations, but the hallux is necessary for gripping prey and without it release would be impossible.



Dr. John Cheslak of Merton Animal Clinic was consulted regarding the owl's condition. After following his recommendation of continued routine wound care and antibiotics, as well as soaking the owl in a footbath every morning, the owl's foot injury had seemed to

The great horned owl is now back at the Wildlife In Need Center, equipped with special polyethylene “boots” made from water noodles! These “boots” will not only keep the injured foot padded while it heals, they will also protect the uninjured right foot from damage due to overcompensating for the left. The left foot is healing wonderfully and the stitches are due to be taken out within the next week. As for the owl, she is still receiving antibiotics and pain meds and will be kept at the WINC clinic until completely healed. When she's ready, her ability to catch live prey will be tested and perfected before she is returned to her home in the wild, hopefully in time for mating season!