

*Patient Tale: The Well-healed Heron*

It was a pleasant day in mid-July as the Montgomery Village citizen watched a young black-crowned night heron hunting for a meal in the pond. Suddenly the bird started squawking and frantically attempted to take flight. With the bird clearly in distress, the citizen jumped in his row boat and went to the rescue. Once the heron was safely in hand, the man made a quick call to Montgomery County Humane Society, who delivered the bird to SCWC in short order.

It did not take long to discover the reason for the bird's distress although the cause remains unknown; perhaps a fish hook became imbedded in the upper leg and tore through the flesh when the heron tried to fly. However it happened, the result was a slit from the foot up to the first joint as neatly cut as if done intentionally with a scalpel. The wound gaped open and severed tendons dangled like strings from the foot. Without tendons to hold it in proper position, the back toe was folded forward under the foot. There was an additional small wound on the inner thigh but my attention was riveted on the lower leg.

I cleaned the wound carefully and snipped off the now useless tendons. With needle and thread, the wound was slowly, pain-stakingly closed and we began a course of antibiotics. There was nothing that could be done to correct the problem with the back toe. If the bird survived the trauma, our vet could deal with the toe later. For the next couple of weeks, the heron's leg was unbandaged, soaked in an antiseptic solution and carefully re-wrapped each day.

As time passed, the wound healed except for the toe. Obviously, the upper surface of the toe was



*practicing perching*

not meant to bear the weight and the result was pressure sores and infection. I arranged for the heron to be seen by Dr. Piety at Wheaton Animal Hospital and she suggested re-suming antibiotics for a week. At the end of that period, the infection was clearing and the heron returned to the hospital to have the troublesome toe amputated. This done, the foot was able to finish healing without any further complications.

By early September, the foot and leg looked almost as good as new and the young heron was perching and walking without the trace of a limp despite being one toe shy. The next step was an outdoor cage with enough space for exercising wings. Finally, on September 26, the heron was deemed fully recovered and was released on a private pond in Poolesville. As usually

happens, the bird expressed his gratitude by flying to a tree branch and shaking his feathers vigorously as if trying to remove all traces of his ordeal by airing himself out. That's ok, we understand.

*by Chris Montuori*