

## *Patient Tale: Rocky the Squirrel*

He was a yard pet and was in trouble. One of many squirrels Mr. and Mrs. Kenneally feed and watch over in their Potomac yard, Rocky had developed a large, raw area on the left side of his face. On February 14, 1999, after two months' effort, Mrs. Kenneally finally live-trapped the right squirrel and brought him to SCWC.

Clinic Supervisor David examined the squirrel and was perplexed; whatever the problem, it would take more than one experienced person to deal with the animal. Mrs. Kenneally was very concerned about the squirrel, whom she had named Rocky. Guessing the squirrel may have suffered a puncture wound that had become infected, David started Rocky on antibiotics and made him comfortable in one of our cages. Although he was not happy to be confined, Rocky did not appear to be in any physical discomfort.



*Rocky post-surgery*

When I arrived, my attention was immediately focused on Rocky. A large mass of pink tissue protruded from the left eye socket, completely obliterating the squirrel's eye. I knew this was no ordinary abscess and called for veterinary assistance. Dr. Holifield, at Best Friend's Animal Hospital, was willing to help and asked that Rocky be delivered the following morning.

Dr. Holifield performed surgery to remove the mass of tissue. She was amazed to find that the underlying tissue, including the eye, was simply gone, as if eaten away. She carefully preserved the

tissue and delivered it to the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Animal Health Laboratory in Frederick. Later that same day, Dr. Quance, the pathologist, contacted us with his findings: cancer! He had been unable to find any published literature concerning this type of tumor, a teratoma, having ever occurred in squirrels. When it occurs in other species, including humans, it is almost always located in the genitals, not the side of the head. Dr. Quance explained that a teratoma is like a tumor that has not decided what it wants to be when it grows up. The tumors usually contain cells from many other areas such as teeth, nerves, brain, skin, etc. Often thought to be an undeveloped "twin," teratomas are considered developmental tumors rather than environmentally caused. If Dr. Hollifield had managed to remove the entire tumor, there was a good chance it would not grow back; but that was a big "if."

Despite medication to ease his discomfort, Rocky appeared to feel pretty miserable during the days immediately following his surgery. In the following weeks, the incision healed and Rocky recovered his old vim and vigor. Every time we tried to observe him, he turned his blind eye toward us. It was easy to see that everything was healing nicely. Rocky adjusted very well to his disability and when placed in a large outdoor cage, showed no difficulty scrambling around on branches.



*Rocky surveys his home territory after being away for almost a month*

There was no evidence that the tumor was returning and on May 3, 1999, Mrs. Kenneally was delighted to pick up Rocky and return him to his old home. A few weeks later, SCWC received a number of pictures showing Rocky back about the business of being a squirrel. Rocky is one of a limited number of wild animals that has the best of both worlds: he is totally free to live as nature intended and, at the same time, has guardian angels, in the form of the Kenneallys, to watch over him. thanks to these caring people, Rocky was given a second chance at life.

*By Chris Montuori, staff*



*Rocky back home*