



## DON'T LOSE YOUR HEAD

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Toward the end of January, a squirrel was trapped in the attic of a residence. The homeowners noticed that the squirrel did not look quite right and brought it to Second Chance. The squirrel was in pretty sorry shape with a nasty, old, infected injury on the top of its head. It was also badly dehydrated and appeared quite lethargic. Having had many animals arrive apparently comatose only to revive when they are picked up, we cautiously reached into the trap. Sure enough, he still had plenty of fight left and it was a struggle trying to keep hold of this pound of pure muscle.

Since squirrels are capable of inflicting painful injuries, and his wound was at the "business end," we decided to sedate him. Once he was snoozing peacefully, we took a close look at the top of his head. He had a thick scab as a cap and we could tell instantly that the injury was old and badly infected. Carefully, we began flushing around the wound with warmed saline solution. Soon, we were able to lift the scab off and found the entire top of his head had been scalped; in some areas, the skull was exposed. Not only was the wound grossly infected, it was also quite extensive. We wondered if it was even worth trying but we've seen too many miracles to give up without a fight.

With care and patience, staff member, Dave Williams, began cleaning the wound. I was concerned that bandaging the head would be impossible but Dave came up with an ingenious wrap that resembled a helmet extending the bandage around both front legs to prevent the squirrel from scraping it off. We gave Helmet Head a shot of penicillin to fight the infection and injected sterile fluids under the skin to help alleviate the dehydration. He was treated for parasites and a medication schedule was written for an oral antibiotic given twice a day for 2 weeks. He was placed in a cage and we waited to see if he would survive the night.

When we arrived the next morning and peeked in at Helmet, we were greeted with the growls of an unhappy squirrel. He didn't like being here and was telling us so in no uncertain terms. He received his antibiotics and was returned to his cage. We draped a cloth over the cage so he wouldn't see people, his archenemies, and left him to rest. He found his diet of mixed nuts, peanuts, fresh fruits and veggies to be quite acceptable and was soon munching away. Any time we looked in on him, he scurried into his box and, in squirrel talk, told us to get lost!

Every other day, it was necessary to change Helmet's bandage, a process we didn't enjoy any more than he did. Amazingly enough, the squirrel we had almost considered a lost cause began to heal. During the weeks that followed, the wound became smaller and smaller until we were finally able to leave the bandage off. During all that time, we never saw Helmet scratching or pulling at the dressing; other than his obvious disdain for us, he was a model patient.

By mid-March, not only had new skin grown to cover the skull but new fur had also developed. Only a couple of small sparsely furred spots gave any indication of the horrible wound this animal had suffered. On March 26, I called his rescuers to tell them Helmet Head was ready to go home. He was sent off in the cage he had occupied for two months and, the following morning, was released back to his familiar territory. Once again, we marveled at the remarkable recuperative powers of our native wildlife.

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