

*Patient Tale: Poor Little P.J.*

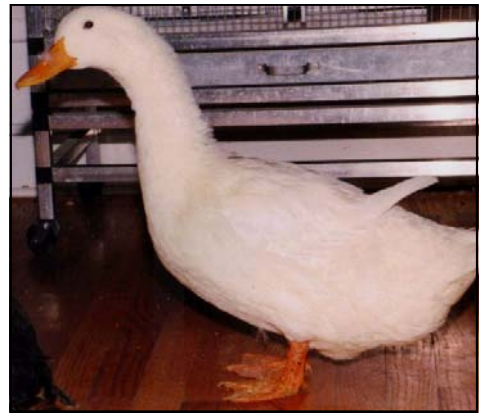
It was May 22, 2004 and the year's orphaned ducklings and goslings were beginning to pour in when a citizen arrived with a white duck. She has rescued it from a pond in Upper Marlboro and it was looking none too good. SCWC is a wildlife center and we know that white ducks are not wild. We identified it as a Pekin duck and knew that there were not many other places that were equipped to deal with ducks. Because this was not the citizen's pet duck, and there few other options, we agreed to accept the Pekin.

The duck was in such poor shape and we were not sure she would survive. Mallards are NOT monogamous and the drakes (males) will happily try to mate with any duck that even looks female. If there are a lot of drakes and very few females on a pond, the females are often set upon by gangs of eager males. It is not a pretty site! The male mounts the female and grabs the back of her neck with his beak. During the mating process, he may scratch her back with his claws. If a female has a single partner, this ritual does not harm; if every drake on the pond tries to mate with her, the results can be fatal. Females, even juvenile males, are often seriously injured or killed during what can only be described as gang rape. Mallards can fly quite well but a domestic Pekin is a weak flier; she would have great difficulty flying from one pond to another to escape the assault.

This duck had undoubtedly been "dumped" by someone who thought it would be "neat" to give their kids an Easter duckling. When it stopped being a cute, fuzzy duckling and became a Plain Jane adult duck that needed space, constant cleaning and a lot of food, they decided to "release" it where there were other ducks. That is equivalent to releasing an unwanted cat into an open field! A domestic animal has little to no chance of surviving in the wild. They are bred to serve our needs. Domestic ducks are heavy-bodied with weak wings in order to provide meat for our dinner tables; unable to fly well, they are easy prey to wild predators and are definitely not equipped to fend off the unwelcome attention of amorous males.

P.J. had extensive abrasions on her back and neck, all her feathers had been stripped away and her skin was in shreds. Her eyes were inflamed and crusty, she was emaciated, dehydrated and was so weak she could not hold up her head. We cleaned her wounds, gave fluids by injection to rehydrate her, started antibiotics to clear her eyes and guard against infection from the wounds on her back and neck before settling her into a private cage to see if she could recover.

Although she was eating a little, after one week she had lost 200 grams. We decided we needed to take more aggressive action and began by passing a tube down her throat to feed her liquefied duck food. After several days, she began eating on her own. The wounds on her back and neck healed and she began to grow new feathers.



*A full recovery for our much beloved P.J.*

Over time, P.J. became very talkative and enjoyed wandering around the clinic while her cage was being cleaned. A first, she enjoyed a swim in our sink but had to be monitored carefully to keep her head out of the water. Eventually, she graduated from our kitchen sink to our bathtub and relished her daily swims. Her left leg kept slipping out from under her, we never knew why, but, ultimately, even that problem resolved itself. She is now healthy and

happy and has been placed in a good home with other Pekins, where she will be protected and well-cared for the rest of her life.

When we domesticate animals, we become responsible for their well-being. These animals are dependent on people to care for them. Whether they are cats, dogs, rabbits or ducks, we mold them to our needs and eliminate the instincts and skills they need to survive in the wild. It IS a jungle out there! Before you decide to get a pet of any kind, please do some research to determine the kind of care required by that type of animal. If you are not willing to commit to caring for it by providing the proper environment, food and veterinary care necessary to keep it happy and healthy for its natural lifespan, do not get it! These are living, feeling animals that look to us for their health and safety. P.J. was lucky, she got a second chance. Many other domestic animals are simply abandoned when the novelty of the owning something different wears off.

*by Chris Montuori, staff*