

Patient Tale: Back to Basics

It was a rare day in January, a day when more than one patient was being admitted for care. Most of our winter patients have bounced off a car and it appeared that this pretty little lady had suffered from a similar fate. Now there are many people out there (other rehabbers included) that do not get as excited about Northern mockingbirds as I do, but then most people did not grow up in the country like I did, constantly serenaded by dozens of male mockers guarding their territories and all the females and young within.

When I pulled this seemingly-drab grey and white bird from the holding container, she turned her head to the side so she could regard me with one of her bright yellow eyes. A quick but thorough initial exam found no obvious fractures or other injuries. She was in excellent body condition - great weight, quick reflexes and strong enough to struggle in my hand and deliver a strong peck when it was obvious that I was not immediately letting her go.

I set her up in one of our small *Green Cages* so I could keep an eye on her and her behavior without her knowing I was watching. Although she seemed stand on her own, she was actually using her long tail as a prop. She was also head-tracking slightly, making it appear as though she was watching a slow but riveting tennis match. After a quick dose of an anti-inflammatory, I set her up with food, water and low perches, and turned the heating pad under her cage to low.

The next morning, I eagerly peeked in on "my" girl and she glared right back at me. Though still head-tracking, she was no longer propping herself up with her tail. Another quick dose of the anti-inflammatory during cage cleaning and I left her alone for the rest of the day (except for occasional peeks).

The days past and she improved, readily scarfing down all the mealworms I could provide and all the fruits and veggies I could mince small enough for her to swallow. After a week of rest in her *Green Cage* she was ready to be moved to larger accommodations in our *Front Room*. Setting up her new cage as prettily as I could, with many pine branches (with needles) to provide "natural" places to hide, I crossed my fingers that she would settle in and not be set back in her care from the stress of being moved.

She adjusted to her new cage quite nicely and was even comfortable enough to display her wing bars at me when she felt I was getting too close. Whenever I cleaned her cage, she would still turn to the side to regard me with one of her bright yellow eyes, but otherwise seemed unperturbed by my presence.

Another week went by and soon she was set up in an even larger cage on our *Side Porch*, giving her more room to exercise and allowing her to gradually adjust to external temperatures. At the end of her week on the *Side Porch*, she was test flown in a larger area and she passed with flying colors, taking off and landing with ease. Since the weather was so agreeable (a rarity in early February), we knew that her time with us was done. The door to her cage was opened and out she flew into the trees without so much as a backwards glance. Success!

Though not as glamorous looking as all the hawks, owls and brightly colored songbirds, this little girl nonetheless added some beauty to an otherwise drab winter.

by Brittany Davis, staff



displaying her wing bars