



Sparky's Story

On September 2, 2011 a Red Shouldered Hawk was brought to the hospital at Save Our Seabirds (SOS) after being severely singed by a methane gas burner. The burners emit flames to periodically burn off the gas at the local landfill. Upon arrival our staff assessed the bird and found it to be a young male (approximately 1 year-old) with severe burns to his beak and feet along feathers that were completely burnt off down to the melted shafts.

This threat to birds is not a new phenomenon, but rehabilitators have recently become more cognizant of the issue as casualties come into centers such as SOS. Raptors are burned when they land on or fly over burners installed that flare off methane gas that accumulates inside sanitary landfills. Currently, there are no national statistics available to estimate the number of birds killed. Injury takes place at landfills because the sites serve as excellent hunting grounds for birds of prey. Solid waste at landfills includes food items and attracts rodents. Furthermore, birds of prey may use the rising hot air from trash decomposition to help them soar.



By October of 2011 the young male hawk was consistently showing signs of recovery. The burnt portion of his beak began peeling away revealing new tissue (The outer surface of the beak consists a thin horny sheath of keratin called the rhamphotheca) and the burnt leg skin also began peeling away. The severely burnt feather shafts had been pushed out by new shafts which appeared to be growing normally. The hospital staff nicknamed him "Sparky" and became very hopeful that he would eventually make a full recovery and be returned to the wild. Sparky remained in the hospital until the beginning of November in order to assure that he was eating properly and that his wounds stayed clean.

Sparky was moved to the recovery mew in the middle of November 2011. He is now eating really well, growing feathers, healing and has made a new friend. He was put in with an older female Red Shoulder Hawk, which is recovering from a fractured wing, and they have truly bonded. She has become quite protective of him and he cuddles right up to her. It is still a long road to recovery for them both which will more than likely include a form of physical therapy in order to assure that their wings function properly. It may take up to a year but who knows...maybe if all works out well we can release them together.



Sparky showing how his feather shafts are coming along beautifully. You can also see how his beak is growing back in.