

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Local couple rescues injured baby owl

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The Bandera Prophet

A Bandera County couple added a once-in-a-lifetime experience to their repertoire early one day last week. Amidst a pile of feathers on their patio was a juvenile owl, and they thought the worst.

“We woke up Friday morning [and we] found a bird who had ‘crashed’ into our window during the night,” Julie Pickron said. “He was lying in a heap looking lifeless...then he sat up but seemed unable to move.”

Pickron and her husband Jeff immediately sheltered the young raptor, began researching how to care for it, and made some calls to local animal sanctuaries.

“After calling a rescue in Kerrville, we were referred to a nice young lady in Pipe Creek,” Pickron said.

The baby, named Screech in honor of its breed, was sent with its rescuer for care, rehabilitation and eventual release.

The screech owl is a small nocturnal owl with yellow eyes and prominent ear tufts. Nestlings are covered with fluffy white down. They are nocturnal, spending their days in a tree cavity, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Their menu includes large insects and small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, bats, spiders, scorpions, snails and earthworms. They swallow their food whole and small pellets of indigestible materials such as bone, fur and arthropod exoskeletons are regurgitated periodically.

“Should you find fresh, moist pellets on the ground underneath a large shade tree, it is a good indication you have an owl in your yard,” the TPWD states.

According to the The Owl Foundation, it may be tempting to keep an orphaned or injured baby owl, but it is not advised.

“Baby owls are very cute balls of fluff and can be very accomodating and fun to have around. Don't get sucked in!” the foundation states, adding if one is found, place it in a cardboard box big enough for the bird to sit up in, but not large enough to walk around in.

“The idea is to keep the bird contained in one spot, but as comfortable as possible. If the box is too big the bird can hurt itself as it fights to escape. Broken wings can be rotated improperly and blood circulation can be cut off. Prepare the box by punching holes from the inside out along all walls approximately $2/3$ of the way up... If you have access to a boxcutter, you can cut one inch holes $2/3$ of the way up from the inside out (two - three per side). Place a towel or blanket in the bottom of the box. This provides cushioning, warmth and gripping substrate for the animal.”

Pickron said she heard from the Pipe Creek rescue facility yesterday, and the little owl is doing much better as it prepares to return to the wild.