

Concomitant leg injuries in raptors with wing damage

Juvenile raptors, in their first year, often experience trauma to the wings as they miss their prey or misjudge obstacles, such as fences. Trauma can result in fractures, commonly of radius/ulna or in a cellulitis of the alula (carpal joint).

At the Dullstroom Animal Hospital we have seen two eagles and a buzzard in the last year, all three admitted with wing damage.

The juvenile black eagle (*Aquila verreauxii*) showed marked discomfort on extension of the left wing. He was unable to stand, but reflexes in the talons appeared normal. Radiographs of the wing showed no abnormalities. After five days of intensive nursing, this eagle appeared healthy. A falconer's approach to rehabilitation was adopted, and the eagle was manned (tamed) and

flown to a lure.

Six weeks later, sitting on a bow perch, this eagle took fright and fractured the left tibia. Radiographs of both legs showed bilateral compression fractures, with a sequestrum at the fracture site. The left leg was repaired with plate and screws after removal of the sequestrum. The right leg was left to heal by second intention.

The juvenile brown snake eagle (*Circaetus cinereus*) had a severe sterile cellulitis over the left alula. Radiographs showed no abnormalities. Trauma, due to cartwheeling, was suspected. This type of injury often results in loss of blood supply to the wing tip. Conservative treatment with DMSO and 'brailling' (bandaging the wing to the body) is our treatment of choice. Four weeks after admittance, this eagle

fractured his left tibia on the bow perch. Radiographs and subsequent surgery revealed an old green stick fracture. The wing had started healing. The leg was repaired with a plate and screws.

We suspect a similar sequence of events with the steppe buzzard (*Buteo buteo*). The right carpal trauma resulted in a necrotic wing tip. The buzzard fractured his right tibia several weeks later, in captivity, for no apparent reason. Radiographs were inconclusive regarding possible underlying bone damage.

Our protocol now includes the taking of bilateral leg radiographs of all raptors admitted with wing damage. Release of the birds above, within four weeks of treatment of the wing, would have resulted in certain death in the wild due to the undetected leg injuries.

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