

THE SQUIRREL'S TALE

Earlier this year, **Pamela Hehn**, administrative technician at Sly Park Recreation Area, was working in the park's reservation office when a man entered and asked if she knew anything about wild animals. It turned out that while he was working on the gas tanks at the station across the street, he discovered a wounded squirrel on the ground close to the road and was wondering if anybody at the park could help.

"I went with him to check things out and found the little guy shivering under the man's coat and trying to crawl away," Pamela explained. She saw immediately that the squirrel was in a bad way and would need expert help, so she gently transported him back to the office and called Sierra Wildlife Rescue (SWR).

"I got through to exactly the right person," Pamela said, "and that was Nan Powers. She knew just what to do."

Nan works as both public relations chair and squirrel team leader at SWR. She said her group "recommends putting any rescued animal on a heating pad, set on low, with a lot of soft padding under and over it in a box and a towel to cover the top. In a pinch, you can place a ziplock bag, three quarters full with rice or oatmeal, into a microwave for about two minutes and place it under the box. Warmth is very important for any injured animal, which is probably in shock and can't regulate its body temperature. A warm environment goes a long way toward keeping the animal alive."

The park office had none of these items on hand, but Pamela's colleague and fellow administrative technician **Laura Bonnello** improvised a heating pad by placing wet paper towels inside a plastic bag and warming it in the microwave.

When Nan arrived, the squirrel was safe and warm, but badly dehydrated. The primary cause of the misery was a broken leg. Nan identified the animal as a northern flying squirrel, four to five months old. "These nocturnal creatures are encountered less often than other species," she said. "Last year we cared for nearly one hundred and thirty squirrels of all species, and only nine of them were flying squirrels."

Flying squirrels live throughout the county, but particularly at the higher altitudes. According to Nan, many of the flying squirrels SWR rehabilitates come from the Camino and Pollock Pines area. They feed on a variety of foodstuffs, including lichen, moss, fungi, berries and other fruit, flying insects, beetles, seeds, and nuts.

Earlier in February, Nan reported that the little flyer Pamela turned over to her was doing very well. The elegant purple cast covering his leg from hip to toes gave the squirrel time to heal. It turned out that the leg was broken in two different places. With the cast off, the squirrel will be placed with two other orphaned flyers. Nan said, "Flying squirrels live in communities of about eight to ten, so he needs companionship. All members of this group will be released together in early spring."

"We are very grateful to the staff at EID—as well as the man from across the street!—for rescuing this little fellow," she added. "He would not have survived much longer without their intervention. It's people like these, part of the concerned and caring public who call us when they find an orphaned or injured wild mammal or bird that make it possible for SWR to do what we do—rehabilitate and successfully return injured animals to the wild to live out their lives free, as they were meant to."

For more about Sierra Wildlife Rescue, or to find out how to contact them in a wildlife emergency, visit their website at www.sierrawildliferescue.com.



All pictures courtesy Sierra Wildlife Rescue

Top picture shows an example of a healthy northern flying squirrel.

Other than chipmunks, flying squirrels are the smallest squirrel. They are the only nocturnal squirrel out of the 7 species in El Dorado County.