



Tales from a
Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

**Win a few,
lose a few**

You gotta try. Even though the chances are sometimes stacked against success, you just gotta try. That's what goes through your mind when you bring an electrocuted hawk to the vet for repairs.

The hawk was found in Christmas Valley, struggling through the sagebrush and grass beneath a line of power poles alongside an irrigated hay field. I was with my sons and grandchildren on our way to see how many golden eagle babies there were for us to band in a nest out east of Christmas Valley when suddenly my grandson Joseph shouted, "Stop, there's a hawk on the ground alongside the road!"

My son Dean and another grandson, Tom, bailed out and sure enough, right there alongside the road was a bedraggled first-year red-tail, struggling to escape us.

"It's been shot," my granddaughter Mary-Catherine whispered, as she noticed the hawk dragging a wing as it struggled to get away. Dean, having been through this routine many, many times, ever since he was old enough to care about raptors, gently dropped his jacket over the panicked bird and we had him.

As all the grandchildren, parents and grandparents looked on, one fact became obvious: it probably wasn't shot, but had tangled up with the high-powered power line overhead, as the left wing was badly burned.

Over 12,000 volts of high-powered energy are flowing through the overhead wires, and all it takes is

a millisecond of contact with two of those wires and most times, the victim is toast. Hawks, owls and eagles are always on the lookout for ground squirrels that live in the irrigated hay fields, and use the poles supporting the wires for lookout stations.

It's risky business watching for prey while perched on a pole supporting wires that carry such high voltage, and each year hundreds of raptors are electrocuted all over the western U.S. from accidentally coming into contact with that awesome amount of electrical energy.

Most times raptors die instantly, but occasionally the contact is so brief that the birds are burned at the contact surface to the point where muscles, blood vessels and nerves are badly injured but not destroyed, and that's where raptor rehabbers like Gary Landers of Sisters enter the picture.

When we walked into Gary's receiving lab with the red-tail, which by then Joseph had named "Ambulo" (Latin for "to go on foot"), we all had hopes the hawk would live, but the look on Gary's face suggested otherwise. He's been there, seen that kind of damage too many times...

He treated the bird for dehydration and injected medicine to get its digestive system going again, as the hawk was just skin-and-bones.

"I'll take it to Broken Top Veterinarian Clinic tomorrow," he said, "and see if cold laser therapy will bring

some life into that burned wing."

Then he asked Joseph to place his finger on the injured part of the hawk's wing, and as a comparison, on the uninjured part.

"It's so cold on that area where it's burned, but so warm on the other side," Joseph noted.

Gary, knowing how serious the damage was to the hawk, agreed, and carefully placed the bird in a carrying case for transport to Dr. Little Liedblad's Broken Top Clinic.

The next day Dr. Cassandra Lodge of Broken Top and her helper, vet technician Dani Phillipson, fired up the cold laser therapy equipment and began treating the damaged wing in an effort to begin as much repair as possible to the cells burned by the electrical contact.

Cold laser uses a beam of light to stimulate damaged cells to produce more energy. The overall cellular function is increased, allowing for rapid absorption of nutrients, elimination of wastes, and reproduction of new cells. The new cellular activity aids in:

- Alleviating chronic or acute pain.
- Reducing inflammation.
- Reducing swelling.
- Increasing circulation.
- Speeding up healing and recovery.
- Release of endorphins, the body's natural pain reliever.

Under the best of circumstance, cold laser is successful in stimulating cell



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

Cold laser therapy being performed on an electrocuted red-tailed hawk by veterinarian Dr. Cassandra Lodge and technician Dani Phillipson.

repairs and blood circulation, bringing comfort, health and relief to the damaged area — but this time it didn't work. When Gary brought the hawk back to his facilities and started feeding it the next morning, new damaged spots began to appear, showing where the wing and body had come into contact with the high voltage several times.

It's tough to finally have to make the decision that the patient you're doing the best to save is doomed, but that's the way it was with the hawk; its contact with 12,000 volts of electricity was just too

severe for the bird to handle.

Joseph was agonized to hear the cold laser treatment failed to perform the miracle he was hoping for; none of us who work with wildlife enjoy it when we fail. Cassey and her crew at Broken Top didn't enjoy it either.

But it's not all doom-and-gloom. Many a story has appeared in *The Nugget Newspaper* of raptors who went back to the wild through the use of Broken Tops's talented technicians and their cold laser to repair damage caused by all sorts of injuries. And they'll do it again tomorrow.

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