

Look WH000s back! Owl makes third visit to New England Wildlife Center after reinjuring himself

“This great horned owl was first admitted to the Cape Branch of the New England Wildlife Centers back in 2021 for a traumatic eye injury that required our veterinary team to have to remove the damaged eye.

Fortunately, adult owls can still be released with only one eye if they can pass all of our tests to show they are able to compensate. As nocturnal hunters, they do not rely on vision as much for prey location but rather their hearing.

After months of care, he was released back to the wild by the Wareham Department of Natural Resources. Now over a YEAR later he was found by the same natural resource officer, but this time for a severe wound to his leg, seizing, and wreaking of skunk.



New England Wildlife Center photo.

Great horned owls have a poor sense of smell and often prey on skunks, however, we think he might have gone after one that fought back. A direct hit of skunk spray to the face can result in temporary blindness, vomiting, and even seizures. While he is also being assessed for other infectious diseases, we believe based on how potent he smelled he got a significant amount of spray to his face. His leg wound was several days old and a large portion of the skin was infected and necrotic.

Once our vet removed all the infected tissue it was determined that there was not enough healthy skin left to close over the

muscle layer. Without proper skin coverage, the muscle layer will eventually dry out and die as well. We decided to perform a skin transplant to cover the exposed tissue. Healthy tissue was taken from over the owl's chest, which is an area that has excess skin.

After a small piece of skin was removed, the chest area was sutured closed and the skin graft was placed over the leg. The transplanted skin was sutured into place covering over all exposed muscle. The leg was then bandaged and we will perform bandage changes every few days to monitor how the skin is healing.

We are hopeful this procedure will give him a second chance, excuse me third, chance of life in the wild. The fact he was able to survive over a year with one eye does show he was compensating well so we are confident he will continue to thrive when his leg heals." -New England Wildlife Center.