



Three Black Crowned Night Heron Chicks

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On May 7, 2007, two Black Crowned Night Heron chicks were found on the ground under the Heron Rookery trees near the Duke energy plant in Morro Bay, apparently having fallen out of their nest. Not able to return the chicks, the Pacific Wildlife Care volunteers accepted the little birds into the facility to be cared for until old enough to be released back into the wild.



It was assumed these two were siblings and they soon became favorites of the PWC workers. Constantly interacting with one another and chattering back and forth over each new discovery in their area, they seemed to be inseparable.

Then a week and a half later another Black Crowned Night Heron chick, younger than the first two, was found under the same heron rookery. Our rehabilitators took it in thinking three would be as easy to care for as two. But not so. The two older siblings were not eager to welcome the tiny newcomer into their arena, intimidating him at feeding time and just giving the new little heron a bad time in general.

It was decided to separate the siblings from the new arrival but still keep them in close proximity so that they could see and hear each other but the newcomer would have his own space for retreat if circumstances warranted. It wasn't long before the siblings began to tolerate the younger bird's presence and they eventually came to share the same large enclosure. Even though they were all together, the two siblings were definitely the Dynamic Duo with the smaller one always keeping a safe distance of about 10 feet from the other two.

As they grew, they were allowed access to the pool in the main Flight Cage, and this became their main “hang out”, shared with the Gulls at the Center at that time.

In mid June, with the two older Herons self feeding, they were released at the Rookery where they had been found. But within only a few days they were reported as being seen in the middle of Embarcadero Road and needing help. They had to be returned to the Center to further develop their survival skills.

Within a short time the third chick appeared to be gaining confidence and exhibited good survival skills of his own and it was decided to try releasing all three Herons together near the mouth of San Geronimo Creek where another Heron Rookery existed. Because Black Crowned Night Herons are good at socializing, it was felt the colony would provide our young birds with good role modeling for survival.

The release took place on June 26, with Linda Tanner and Randy Ball carrying the birds to a remote area not easily accessible to humans. Once the carrier doors were opened, the birds stepped out and began calmly exploring their new surroundings. It was a pleasure to see them immediately begin to act like the Herons we see in the wild.

One bird creeping to the creeks edge, neck extended over the water, peering into its depths for food, a second one hopping to the top of a low shrub scoping out the new area and the third one standing perfectly still, listening and then reacting to the voices and movements of the other rookery herons. After an hour of observations, the birds were left on their own.

Linda went back the next morning to check on the youngsters and found all three in the rookery eucalyptus tree along with approximately 13 other herons. Interestingly, the Dynamic Duo siblings were perched side by side with the younger bird on another branch about 10 feet away. We wish our young birds all the best.