



House Bill 7783

Sponsor: Representative Rebecca Kislak

Health and Safety - Pesticide Control

Referred to Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Submitted by:

Sheida Soleimani, Executive Director for Congress of the Birds wildlife rehabilitation center

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is Sheida Soleimani. I'm an artist, and an associate professor at Brandeis University. But most pertinent to the reason I am writing: I'm a federally licensed and state licensed rehabilitator, and the executive director of Congress of the Birds— the only wildlife clinic in our state that focuses on the rehabilitation and release of wild birds specifically.

I'm going to assume that most people have not seen an owl, hawk, falcon, or eagle up close. Maybe you hear them while walking in the woods, or see them through binoculars if you are out birdwatching. But by up close, I mean, in your hands. To really appreciate the devastating effects of rodenticide, there's nothing more heart wrenching than holding a dying bird of prey in your hands. As a rehabber, we've learned what to look for when we intake a bird of prey, or scavenging bird. Are they showing neurological signs? Is their mouth pale? Are they covered in bruises? Are they actively bleeding, and the blood wont clot?

I'll never forget the first time that I admitted a patient with rodenticide poisoning. It was an Eastern Screech Owl, and it had been found on a sidewalk near an apartment complex by a family taking a walk with their dog. When they arrived to my clinic, their teenage daughter was holding the owl, who was wrapped in a towel stained with the owls blood—it was bleeding from its mouth and it didn't seem to be stopping. As she handed it to me, she asked with her eyes wide 'Is it going to be okay?', and I had to truthfully answer her, 'I don't know. It's unlikely, but I will do everything I can'.

It's crazy to think of a body so tiny to be losing so much blood (Eastern Screech Owls are usually around 180 grams, which is around the weight of an avocado). Not only was this owl bleeding

from its mouth without clotting, its little body was covered in bruises, and it was seizing. Each one of its eyes were rapidly dilating and contracting out of sync. The owl looked terrified. In these situations, I can't help but wondering if they, too, wonder if they will be okay. If they know that they are dying, or how they feel about needles being pushed into their bodies and tubes being shoved down their throats as I try everything I can to help them, meanwhile, their frail little bodies deteriorate in my hands.

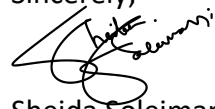
I tried everything in my tool kit. Vitamin K to help reduce the anticoagulant effects. Toxiban (a charcoal and kaolin suspension) to absorb the poison in the stomach. Fluids to help replenish all of the lost blood, and anti-inflammatories to help with its pain. I then placed the little owl into my oxygen machine, and hoped for the best, but I knew what to expect. 6 hours later, the owl died. Face down in the oxygen chamber, its eyes open wide, its pupils dilated at different sizes. I'll never forget its face.

I won't ever forget the faces of any of the patients I've had that have come in for suspected SGAR poisoning. Neither will my students. In 2020, while teaching remotely on zoom, my doorbell rang. I wasn't expecting anyone, but I told my students to sit tight while I checked to see who it was. My computer was in earshot of the door, and my students heard everything. It was Gina, one of the Providence Animal Control officers who brings wild animals to my clinic on a weekly basis. 'Sorry I didn't call' she said 'I was on a drive to pick up another animal, and saw this hawk and had to bring it to you. It needs help, and I didn't want to wait too long'. She ushered towards a carrier with a gorgeous adult Red-Tailed Hawk in it. 'I need the carrier back—can you grab it from out of there'. I obliged, and looked at the bird. It was shaking, and the inside of its mouth was pale. 'What's wrong with it?' Gina asked. 'Likely rodenticide' I replied—I'm going to take it downstairs and begin treatment.'

As I walked over to my laptop to tell my students that we would have to end class early, the hawk began rapidly declining in my arms. Its head started to hang as it panted with an open mouth, and its body shuddered, as it took its last breath. It died in my arms, and my students witnessed it. In shock at how quickly everything happened, I laid the body of the hawk on my floor, and described to my students what had happened. I told them that the hawk was exhibiting symptoms associated with SGAR poison.

People ask me if I get used to the death. If I get used to things dying, or having to euthanize things. And the answer is no- it will always be no. As long as I have to see animals suffer and die because of human negligence and selfishness, I will never become accustomed to their unnecessary deaths. Is it going to take more birds dying in my arms for our legislatures to take notice? This issue is a RI issue. This is our issue. I urge the council to support House Bill 7783 to ban second generation anti- coagulant rodenticides across Rhode Island.

Sincerely,



Sheida Soleimani, Executive Director, Congress of the Birds