

Tiny owl saved after getting stuck in Rockefeller Center's Christmas tree

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A worker setting up the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree made an unusual discovery: this tiny owl hiding near the tree's base. Photo: Ellen Kalish/The Washington Post

Ellen Kalish runs the Ravensbeard Wildlife Center in New York. It is a wild animal rescue. A rescue is a place that cares for sick or hurt animals.

Kalish gets many calls about sick animals. On November 16, a woman called Kalish. She asked if the center could take in a tiny owl. Then the woman said where the owl was found. Workmen spotted it in the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center!

Rockefeller Center is a group of buildings in New York City. Each year a giant Christmas tree is placed there. It is a New York tradition.

Tiny Owl Was A Big Surprise

The rescued owl was named "Rockefeller."

A worker found the bird when he was putting up the 75-foot tree. The owl was hiding in the base of the tree, Kalish said. At first, workers thought the owl might be hurt. It would not leave the tree's base.

One of the workers called his wife. He told her he was bringing the owl home. He asked if she could find a place that helps animals.

A Long Trip To New York City

A raptor is a hunting bird that eats live prey, like mice. The owl is the smallest kind of raptor in the Northeast.

The Rockefeller tree was cut down about three hours away from New York City. Kalish wondered: How did Rockefeller end up stuck in the tree in the first place?

She has a few ideas. He could have gone to the tree to hide in a hole. Maybe then he got trapped, she said. He may have been too scared to move.

Back Into The Wild

Kalish picked up Rockefeller at a gas station. He was tucked in a cardboard box. Kalish peeked in. She was surprised. Rockefeller looked pretty good! He did not look too sick.

She brought Rockefeller back to the center. She gave him plenty of water and left two mice in the pet carrier. The mice were gone by the next morning.

Rockefeller spent most of his time at the wildlife center eating or sleeping. He also saw the vet. He has no broken bones, Kalish said.

Rockefeller won't spend too long at the center. Kalish is preparing to let him go sometime soon, at nightfall. That is when owls normally wake up. She will bring a camera to take pictures of him flying away.

"I will wish him a very long and happy life," Kalish said.