

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

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.02.20

Word Count **638**

Level **820L**



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 Saugerties, New York. She is used to getting calls about taking in wild animals. When a woman called on November 16 asking if she could rescue an owl, she was happy to help.

Then, the caller told her where this tiny owl was hiding out. It was found inside the Christmas tree in the Rockefeller Center. The owl has been dubbed "Rockefeller" in honor of where it was found.

"I've been doing this for 20 years and I've never heard a story like that," Kalish said.

It is a yearly tradition to put up a Christmas tree in Rockefeller Center. But this year, the tree looked a little worse for the wear. The Norway spruce from Oneonta, New York, is 75 feet tall. Many people made fun of its sagging branches and thin needles. They called the tree a "metaphor for 2020," meaning its sad look was a reminder of how tough 2020 has been for many people.

The tale of the rescued owl quickly became the silver lining for this year's tree.

Before the spruce was put up, one of the workers spotted the creature. It was buried in the base of the tree, Kalish said. At first, they thought the owl might be injured because it was glued to the tree's base.

A Long Journey To Manhattan

The worker called his wife to tell her he was bringing the owl home. He asked her to find a place that rescues wildlife animals.

The raptor, or bird of prey, is the smallest of its kind living in the Northeast. It most likely traveled with the tree on its 170-mile journey to Manhattan. So, how did he end up stuck in the tree in the first place?

Kalish offered a few possibilities. He could have flown to the tree to hide there because he was injured and then got trapped later, she said. Or maybe once the tree was loaded onto a truck, the branches squished him into the trunk. He may have just been too scared to move.

There is no proof about where he came from, but Kalish does not think the owl flew in from Central Park. "That would be the last place he would want to go in the middle of chaos and construction. Why would he pick that tree if he had a choice not to? He's smart and he wouldn't do that," she said.

After Kalish got the full story on the owl, she met the woman who called her at a gas station. Around 5 p.m. on November 16, the woman handed her a cardboard box with the owl inside. Kalish was surprised by what she found.

Back Into The Wild

"He looked up at me, and I was relieved to see that he was looking in relatively good shape," Kalish said of their first encounter.

When Kalish brought Rockefeller back to her refuge, she said she gave him plenty of water and left two mice in the plastic pet carrier. They were gone by the next morning. He has spent most of his time at the wildlife center eating or sleeping.

On Wednesday, Rockefeller went to the vet to get some X-rays taken. He has no fractures or broken bones, Kalish added.

Rockefeller is not expected to spend too long at the center, she said. She is preparing to release him soon. It will be at dusk, when owls usually wake up. The release will be quick and quiet, she said, and she will bring a camera to capture him flying away.

"I will wish him a very long and happy life — something we all strive for," Kalish said. "For me, it's the Christmas miracle of 2020. It's a pretty great story. I was honored to be of service."