BITE-SIZED SCIENCE
Entangled Pelican Rescue

Savanna Barry
Regional Specialized Extension Agent
Brown Pelican

- Eat small fish
- Keen eyesight
- LARGE wingspan – 6.5 feet!
- Hollow bones – only 8-10 lbs
- Dive for food
- Drain water before swallowing fish
Adult vs. Juvenile Pelican

Adult – yellow and white head

Juvenile – brown head
Common Seabird Injuries

- Entanglement in fishing gear
  - Broken wing/injured tendons
  - Infections
  - Exhaustion/starvation/dehydration
- Choking on bony fish scraps
  - Digestive distress
If you hook a pelican while fishing, do NOT cut the line!

https://myfwc.com/education/wildlife/unhook/
So, what should you do?
Follow these steps to save the bird
Step 1: Safety check

- Be sure the area is safe
  - No other hazards
- Find a buddy to help
- Put on sunglasses or other eye protection
- Best practice to wear gloves
Step 2: Reel in or capture

• If bird still hooked to line, either
  1) reel the bird in slowly and evenly (not jerking the line while reeling)
  OR
  2) Use hoop or cast net to raise bird up to pier
     • useful if bird is sitting on the water and pier is very high above

Remember, the pelican does not know you are trying to help and will resist and try to defend itself
Step 2: Reel in or capture

- If bird has already been cut loose:
  - Use telescoping dip net to capture the bird
  - Helpful to have two people
  - Use a larger net than you think you need and be careful not to strike bird with sides of net

If the bird is still capable of flight, it may not be possible for you to capture it.
Steps 3 + 4: Calm and Grasp

- Toss a towel, shirt, or hat over the bird’s head to calm it
- Grasp the bird’s beak firmly but place finger in between to allow for air flow
- Fold bird’s wings gently but firmly against the body
Mind the Beak

- Hook on end of beak
- Edges of beak sharp
Steps 3 + 4: Calm and Grasp

• If you need to pick the bird up:

1) Keep one hand holding the beak

2) wrap other arm around bird with wings folded

3) Grasp both legs and cradle bird
Step 5: Cut barb off Hook(s)

- Push the hook forward to expose the barb
- Use wire cutters to cut barb off
Step 6 + 7: Remove Hook and Check

- Remove hook
- Check bird over for other hooks and fishing line
Step 6 + 7: Remove Hook and Check

- Check that bird’s wings can fully extend
- Check for other injuries
  - Tears in pouch
  - Swelling/heat or deep cuts
  - Feel breast bone to test weight
If bird seriously injured….

• If a bird is seriously hurt (broken wing, punctured throat pouch) or has swallowed the hook, professional help is needed

• Transport Permit from FWC needed to routinely transport birds to rehab
  • Permit to Temporarily Possess Sick or Injured Wildlife (MBTP)

• FWC list of rehabbers/transporters
  https://ocean.floridamarine.org/SeabirdRehabilitators/
Step 8: Release Bird

- Birds without serious injuries and with plenty of weight/energy can be released on-site
- Point bird’s head toward the water
- Do not throw bird into the air
  - Stressed birds do not usually fly away immediately
Remember...

• Safety first!!
• When should you refer the issue to FWC/USFWS, experienced rescuers, or other professionals?
  • Raptors – hawks, ospreys, eagles
  • Cormorants, gulls/terns
  • If injured bird near a rookery
Do not attempt a rescue when injured bird is located near rookery and approaching to rescue one bird would disturb large number of birds
Preventing Entanglements

Recycle monofilament

Install educational signage at piers and marinas
Preventing Entanglements

Keep bait covered

Do not feed sea birds
Please take a quick poll

• Polling options may not appear if you are using a smartphone or tablet

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Questions?

Savanna Barry, Ph.D.
office: 352-325-6080
savanna.barry@ufl.edu

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