



PAULINE LUBENS — MERCURY NEWS

Chris Battaglia of the International Bird Rescue Research Center demonstrates how to handle a pelican at the Santa Cruz wharf. Observing are Kaitilin Gaffney, left, and Elizabeth Van Dyke. Scores of birds were hurt at the wharf last year.

# Protecting pelicans

Birds

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WHARF-AREA WORKERS TAUGHT TO HELP INJURED BIRDS

By Ken McLaughlin  
Mercury News

Last summer, pelicans and fishermen on the Santa Cruz wharf competed for the same anchovies and sardines. The pelicans lost.

More than 150 pelicans — injured by fish hooks and entangled in lines — were taken to the International Bird Rescue Research Center in Cordelia. Countless others were injured and died without being rescued.

To prevent a similar fiasco this summer, officials at the bird rescue center and Santa Cruz County's Native Animal Rescue group on Wednesday trained people who work in and around the municipal wharf on how to save a pelican.

"It was just a frenzy out here last year," said Buck Arbsland, a long-

time member of the wharf crew.

In addition to being snared by the fishermen's gear, "the pelicans were running into buildings and light poles," he said. "One hit a parked car, broke its neck and died on the spot."

The two dozen people attending Wednesday's pelican class included staff of the Ocean Conservancy, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, the city parks and recreation department and the state Department of Fish and Game, including some lifeguards.

One fisherman, Kiet Lu of San Jose, heard about the training and came, too.

"I was lucky last year," Lu said. "I accidentally hooked a pelican, but it

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## SAVING BIRDS

Wildlife officials advise fishermen not to cast lines off the municipal wharf when pelicans and other seabirds are present. But if they do hook a bird, officials offer this advice:

Never cut the fishing line because the injured bird will fly away and not be able to receive treatment.

Get help from a city employee or Native Animal Rescue volunteer to safely remove the bird from the water with a net.

Do not chase a bird.

Place the bird in one of the wharf's new kennel cages at the wharf headquarters to the right of the entrance.

Call Native Animal Rescue at (831) 462-0726.

Source: State Department of Fish and Game

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fell off."

Lu blamed last year's chaos on inconsiderate and inexperienced fishermen. "They need to pay more attention to what they're doing," he said.

Many fishermen, he said, were casting their baited lines overhand when they should have been dropping them closer to the wharf with weights to attract less attention from the pelicans.

The average number of California brown pelicans caught each week during the summer is three to five, said Kaitilin Gaffney, central coast program manager of the Ocean Conservancy. In late August and early September 2001, as the sardines and anchovies clustered near the wharf, the weekly number ranged from 30 to 40, forcing the city to close parts of the wharf to fishing.

Of the 300 pelicans taken to the International Bird Rescue Research Center last year, 162 were from Santa Cruz. "And 98 percent were there because of line fishing," said Karen Benzel, spokeswoman for the center.

Although most of the birds survived and were returned to the skies, the cost of saving each bird averaged \$200.

Wednesday's training was done by Christian Battaglia, a bird-rescue expert from the center, and Tricia Wilson, a wildlife specialist at Native Animal Rescue. The latter group has donated two cages so that pelicans can be kept in a safe place on the wharf until volunteers from the group arrive.

Exactly how do you rescue a pelican in distress?

Very carefully, Battaglia and Wilson said.

They recommended wrapping each bird in a sheet or towel and covering its eyes so it can't see what's going on. Hold the beak shut, hold its feet, and support its body, they



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More than 150 pelicans were rescued last summer.

said.

"It sounds kind of simple, but you can do a lot of harm if you don't do it right," Battaglia said. "If a bird gets loose, it'll hit you with its wing and you'll go down."

Fishermen who catch a pelican shouldn't cut the line, Wilson said. That will only result in an injured bird flying away, often to die elsewhere.

The California brown pelican has been considered an endangered species for decades. In the United States, the majestic birds' breeding ground is the Channel Islands, where DDT was devastating the population before the pesticide was banned in 1972. The number of new pelicans born each year is now about 10,000, but the birds are still on federal and state endangered lists.

Although city lifeguards attended the training, John Alexiou, the city's marine safety chief, said they will rescue pelicans only when water conditions and staffing levels permit.

"We don't want any mothers asking, 'What if a child was drowning in the water and we went to rescue a pelican?'"

Contact Ken McLaughlin at [kmclaughlin@sjmercury.com](mailto:kmclaughlin@sjmercury.com) or (831) 423-3115.