

# City, animal groups develop pelican rescue plan

Birds

By BRIAN SEALS

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Bird rescuer Chris Battaglia likened a pelican's protruding beak to a snake.

"They come forward, they grab you and pull back," he warned Wednesday afternoon while pulling a rehabilitated

**SANTA CRUZ** brown pelican from a portable kennel.

That was valuable information to about a dozen city lifeguards and public works staffers gathered on the Municipal Wharf.

Hoping to avoid the pelican injuries and deaths of last fall, Battaglia and other members of the International Bird Rescue Research Center and Native Animal Rescue held a short training session on sound ways to rescue the birds when they get hooked or entangled in fishing gear.

During a healthy anchovy and sardine run last year, fishermen and pelicans competed for the small fish. It's food for the birds and bait for the anglers.

The result was 162 injured pelicans near the wharf, about 40 of which died. The birds cost about \$200 each to rehabilitate, center officials said.

"We don't know how many were impacted that were not rescued," said Karen Benzel, center spokeswoman.

Lifeguards, public works employees, people working at private businesses on the dock and NAR all pitched in to help rescue ensnared birds.

Anchovy and sardine runs occur every year during the late summer. Wharf veterans said last year's run was exceptionally large.

"Last year we had a unique situation where we had a lot of birds, a lot of fish and a lot of people in the same place," said Daniel Buecher, wharf supervisor. "We want to be better prepared to handle the birds."

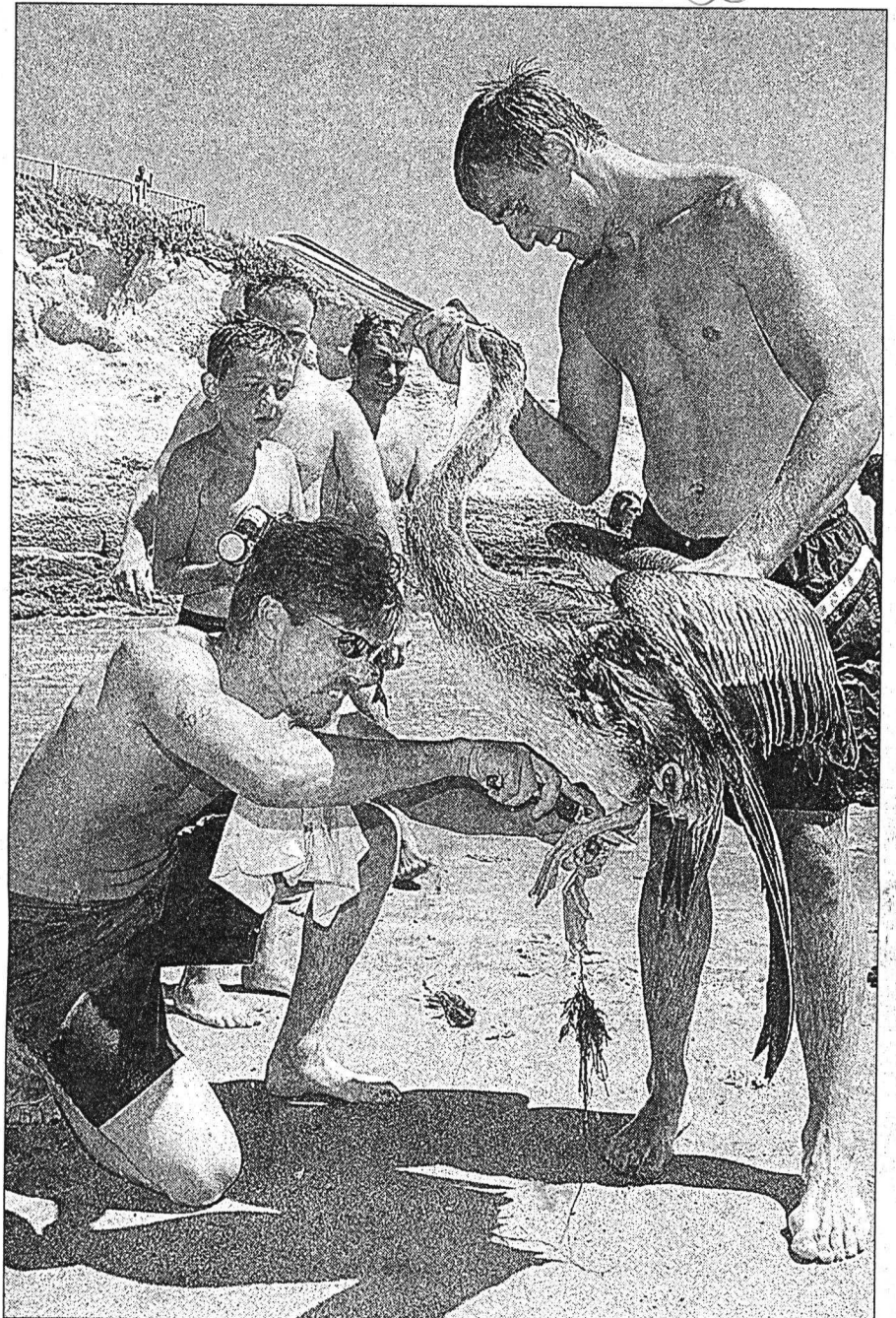
Wednesday's training session showed city workers ways to reduce harm to themselves — and the birds — when dealing with the snared birds.

Some of the tips: Place a sheet over the bird's head; grab the beak firmly; wear safety goggles or glasses; and hold it close to your body while holding its feet.

Fishermen also should not be too hasty to cut their lines if they hook a bird, said Patricia Wilson of Native Animal Rescue. A hook can cause an infection in the bird, and fishing line can cut off blood supply.

Wilson said the average beach visitor shouldn't try to rescue pelicans or other injured birds. If the bird is not mobile, throw a towel or sheet over it and call for help, she said.

The city is also looking at other ways to help fishermen and birds coexist. In November, the City Council approved posting signs warning wharf visitors and anglers of the danger that fishing



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Visitors to the Main Beach untangle fishing line from a pelican they rescued from the surf in August.

poses to diving birds, and how to fish in ways that minimize the danger.

The city is also providing its workers with nets and two portable kennels. Moreover, the council refined a city ordinance to clearly allow the city manager to close to wharf to fishing at times when needed to protect the federally endangered pelicans.

Santa Barbara began posting signs at its Stearns Wharf last year after about two dozen birds died from cuts and infections.

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## Pelican brief

If you see a brown pelican tangled in gear or injured:

- Call Native Animal Rescue at 426-0726. The volunteer group rescues and stabilizes animals before taking them to a care center.
- If the animal is not mobile, place a towel or sheet over the bird. This helps keep it cool and reduces its stress.
- On the wharf, locate a city worker. The Lifeguard headquarters is about halfway down the dock and lifeguards will respond if workload permits as will public works staffers.