

BIRDS

Fish line, hooks hurting pelicans

Spate of injuries noted

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10-4-91
SANTA CRUZ — The pelican's pangs of hunger momentarily give way to confusion as it tries to open its wings to fly.

But its wings are bound to its body by the line of a careless or unknowing fisherman. The hook at the end of the line slowly pierces the bird's skin as the line tightens. Without help, the pelican will eventually die of its injuries or starve.

Native Animal Rescue in Santa Cruz is trying to save more than 45 pelicans recently found tangled in fishing lines and hooks.

"I've been with Native Animal Rescue for eight years and I've never seen anything like this," said Tricia Wilson. "The amount of birds with fishing line and hook injuries is incredible. Some have four and five hooks in them."

The problem can be traced to the heavy anchovy population in local waters. The anchovies draw the birds, and also draw fisherman who know their catch is lurking in the school of small fish.

Wilson said people should be careful when and where they fish.

"People are casting right into the birds because they know that's where the fish are," she said. "We have several birds that have already died and several more we will have to euthanize because they will never recover."

Wilson said it's amazing how much line they find wrapped around some of the birds.

"If they're not rescued immediately, the lines wrap around legs or wings and massive infection sets in," she said. "It cuts off their circulation and they lose limbs."

It's been a double whammy for the birds, who also are succumbing to a suspected algae toxin.

Approximately 200 pelicans and cormorants have died over the past few weeks from what appears to be a toxin that has accumulated in their anchovy food source, though other toxins have not been ruled out, Wilson said.

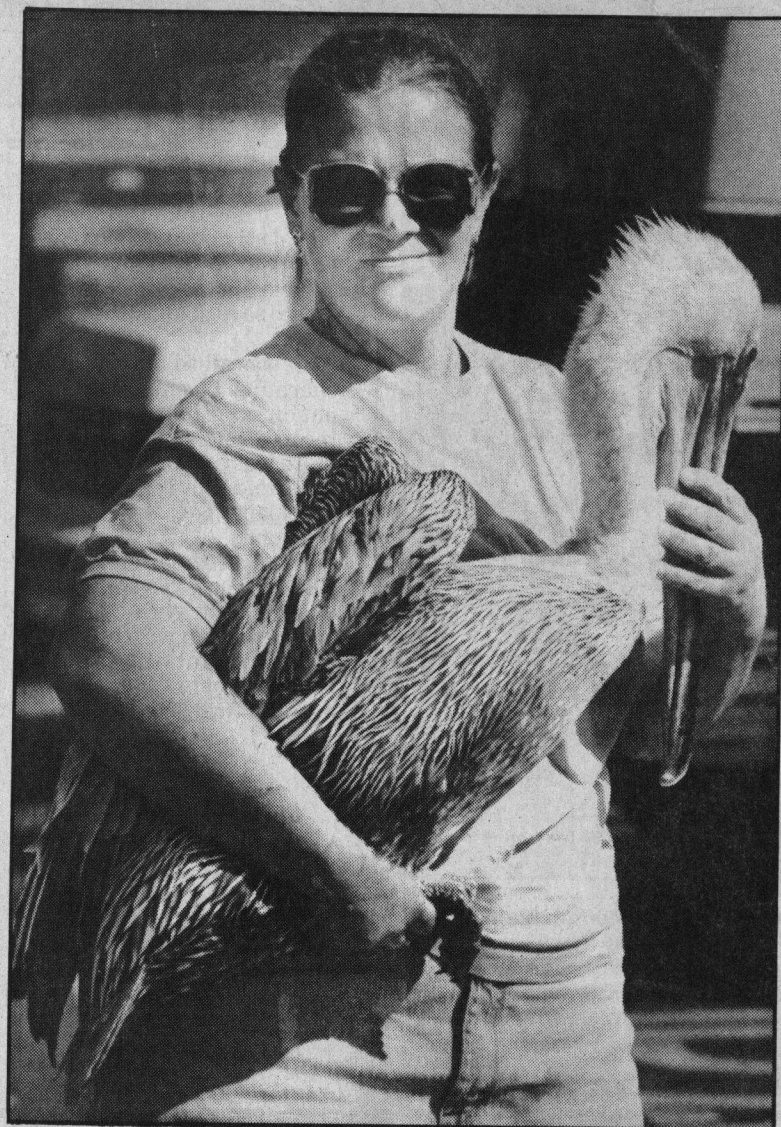
Wilson explained what you should do if you entangle a bird while fishing:

- Don't panic. Very slowly and carefully reel in the line, drawing the bird as close as possible. If you are on an elevated pier or platform, keep the bird in the water and slowly walk the bird to the shore, if possible.

- Carefully wrap a towel or jacket around the bird, put it in a box and call Native Animal Rescue at 462-0726, or the SPCA at 475-6454 or 688-4968, or take the bird quickly to Native Animal Rescue inside the SPCA building, 2200 7th Ave., Santa Cruz.

- Do not attempt to remove the hook. Tissue damage can result from pushing or pulling on a barbed hook embedded in flesh.

- If a bird is tangled in line, cut the line, but do not release the bird. Call, or take the bird to Na-



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Tricia Wilson holds hooked, weakened pelican.

tive Animal Rescue. Infection from hooks and injuries from line can be severe and deadly. The bird will need treatment before it can be released.

- If there are a number of birds feeding in the spot where you're fishing, move to another

spot.

Wilson said Native Animal Rescue will distribute posters and pamphlets on the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf with this and additional information on what to do with a pelican or other bird or sea life caught in a fishing line.