

Volunteers rescue, release pelican at Sepulveda



A distressed pelican (above) was spotted Oct. 25 in the lake at Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve in Encino, Calif., with fishing line and a plastic bottle tangled around its right wing and leg, preventing it from flying. Ernesto Poblana (right) of LA Animal Services' Specialized Mobile Animal Rescue Team carries the distressed pelican to initial treatment after recovering it Oct. 26. (Photos courtesy of Jim Hanlon)



By Jay Field

ENCINO, Calif. — More than two dozen people watched as Eagle Scout candidates from Orange County Troop 1149 opened the animal crate releasing a recovered American White Pelican at the Wildlife Reserve in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Sepulveda Flood Control Basin Dec. 1. Within minutes, the pelican, known to area bird watchers as 'Firebird,' took flight and joined its pod on the reserve's island.

The distressed pelican was spotted by bird watchers in late October with fishing line and a plastic bottle wrapped around its right wing and leg. LA Animal Services' Specialized Mobile Animal Rescue Team captured the injured bird Oct. 26 and eventually turned it over to the International Bird Rescue in San Pedro for treatment and rehabilitation. The fishing line caused small wounds to the bird's right wing fold and right leg.

According to its website, IBR operates two year-round aquatic bird rescue centers in California, which care for more than 5,000 birds every year.

Staff and volunteers of the IBR, SMART and the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society joined photographers and others for the pelican's release. Earlier in the day, volunteers from local colleges planted native California plants and picked up litter.

The 225-acre reserve is managed by the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks under lease by the Corps' Los Angeles District. With more than 200 species of birds, the refuge is considered one of the finest in a major urban area in the country.

(Story compiled from reports by Muriel Kotin, San Fernando Valley Audubon Society, and wildlife photographer Jim Hanlon)

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After its rescue from the lake at Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve in late October, the injured pelican spent several weeks at the International Bird Reserve in San Pedro for medical treatment and rehabilitation. The IBR has 40-foot and 100-foot cool water aviary ponds to help wounded birds recover and to test their ability to fly between perches. (Photo courtesy of Jim Hanlon)



The rehabilitated pelican takes a few steps from its transport crate to the lake at Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve in Encino, Calif., Dec. 1, as bird watchers, volunteers and rescue staffers look on. (Photo courtesy of Mike Stensvold)

The pelican nicknamed 'Firebird' takes a victory lap around the lake at Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve in Encino, Calif., Dec. 1. The fortunate animal was released at the same time as a second rehabilitated pelican found with a broken bill in Long Beach. (Photo courtesy of Jim Hanlon)

