

Our Island wildlife...

Brave 'pelly ladies' fit the bill

Here are a couple of stories about two gutsy ladies in the front line, saving our beautiful pelicans. PHEW!

Amanda from Redlands Seabird Rescue (you would know her if you read the article about "The Pelican Ladies" in the last edition of *SIN*) was helping me on a rescue down at Amity recently.

We had already caught one pelican who had a gang of four hooks embedded in its wing. This bird was treated and released successfully, but we found another bird in the group that needed attention. So, we went about catching it.

It was one of those days where everything was going like clockwork and the pelicans were cooperating.

All this action had drawn a small crowd, standing at a distance behind me. I didn't take much notice of them, as you have to be pretty focused on the job. Anyway, the target bird walked into the snare and bang, got him! Amanda bolted down the beach and grabbed him. I was satisfied that she had a good hold on it.

Just at that moment someone in the crowd yelled, "Isn't that traumatic." Straight away I became defensive and a bit cranky thinking they were talking about the bird, so I turned to them and started to explain that "the last bird we caught had a gang of hooks in it, which is worse than being caught by us." But then I realized the person was the lovely Kim, one of the Amity Rangers. She was almost in hysterics and pointed back to Amanda, "not the bird silly, her!"

I turned around to see Amanda still holding the Pelican, with her entire head stuck down its gob!

By the time I reached her, the pelly had released Amanda but being the champion that she is, she hadn't released the bird. After everything had settled down I asked her how it felt to be swallowed by a pelican. Her reply... "talk about bad breath!" She reckons if you left a bag of pilchards in the sun for a day and then pulled it over your head, that's pelican gob!

Bianca (another of our new recruits) and myself were on pelican patrol at Amity, right down at the southern end at the "Basin."

Until that day Bianca had never even laid a hand on a pelican. We found a bird that looked a bit wrong, but not a real bad one, so I decided that this would be a good opportunity to get her first pelican. Yeah right! Do you think this damn thing would let us catch it? 2 hours later, I told Bianca it was ridiculous, 5 more minutes then we'd call it quits. Almost as soon as I said that, Bianca spotted a bird about 500 metres away, slowly making its way up to us in the Rainbow channel.

I guessed by its body language that it was hungry, but it made no effort to fly. I told Bianca that we should wait because there was something wrong with the bird. 20 minutes later, it arrived. As soon as it walked up on the sand I could see that it had a terrible wing injury.



Illustration By Brenda Papworth

What a lucky bird. Another 5 minutes and we would have missed it because the other bird that we tried to catch earlier was still hanging around. Our target bird realised from the way the first bird was acting, something was up! One hour later and no joy. I asked Bianca how she felt about a footy style rush and dive, which is the absolute last resort tactic. It scares the birds off for good if you miss, not to mention it's pretty scary for us to do as well! Bianca didn't hesitate.. she was keen.

We had figured out that this bird probably couldn't fly, so we lured it as far away from the waterline as possible. I gave her the signal and she was off! Boy the old pelican can waddle pretty fast when being pursued by one very determined young rescuer. They both reached the water at the same time and Bianca made a dive at it. She slipped off its back but still had a grip of one wing. Next thing, the pelly turned around and made a lunge at her. Bianca squealed and let go. I knew that this was it, if the bird got away it would be condemned to a slow painful death. What a sight! One very angry pelican with its bill wide-open facing off with Bianca right there in biting range. She looked at me as if to say what do I do now? "Just jump on it!" I said, "It won't hurt you." And she did! She had that pelican wrapped up and under control like she had been rescuing the buggers for years!

What a bloody legend! This poor bird had a gang of four hooks heavily embedded across its elbow joint, so that it could not move that wing at all. It would definitely have died in terrible pain and starvation if we had not found it. We removed the hooks and released it.

Talk about a baptism of fire!

Jack Jackson