

KSBY TV

Unusual number of pelicans being treated at wildlife care center in Morro Bay

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Sea birds and fishing lines don't mix: just ask the volunteers at the Pacific Wildlife Care Center in Morro Bay, where an unusual number of pelicans are being treated this year.

Since July, the center has taken in 138 pelicans. 30 of them suffered injuries from fishing equipment like hooks, weights and lines.

The center is on track to more than double the number of animals they treated during all of last year. The people at the care center said it seems like nearly every day an animal is coming in with an injury related to fishing hooks and line.

But fishermen said if a bird gets himself tangled up, it is a rare occasion.

Co-director at Pacific Wildlife Care Center, Kathy Duncan, said, "We had one [pelican] that had to be euthanized. It was wrapped so tight around its leg it cut the tendon. We've gotten a few where it's wrapped around the leg and just sliced right through." Duncan added, "We're getting them where their wing may be caught in the line. They'll have a hook in the line, line around the wing, line around the leg, another hook in the body - and they struggle like that all wrapped up and tangled and the hooks just dig deeper and deeper."

There are two sides to every story. Most fishermen consider the pelicans pesky and have little sympathy for them.

Darby Neil owns a sport fishing business in Morro Bay. He is annoyed by the birds.

"Oh, they get everything. You open the receiver and there's 10 of them just diving on you. You're trying to get bait out for the customer. They're just really annoying. Golly," Neil said.

Fishermen said they do everything they can to keep the birds away, but feel they are fighting a losing battle.

Neil added, "When they see a fisherman fishing, so they know it's an easy meal, and they're right there waiting to get anything that the fisherman brings up. So, it's not like the fishermen are casting into the bird and hooking the bird. The bird is aggressively attacking the fisherman's gear."

People at the center said they want to work with the fishermen and the community to do what's best for everyone and every animal.

Donations and volunteers are always needed at the care center. Go to www.pacificwildlifecare.org to find out how you can help.