

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Pier Watch

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Harbor Patrol and Local Residents Try to Save Hooked and Tangled Pelican

Avila Beach, CA January 9, 2005

The Piers of the Central Coast are ideal fishing locations, great weather, tasty food and minimal crowds. Visitors enjoy the fishing permit-free zone, but few are aware of the dangers associated with the inappropriate disposal of fishing tackle.

San Luis Obispo photographer David Wilson recently encountered an Endangered California Brown Pelican entangled in fishing line at the Port San Luis Pier (Harford Pier). "The Pelican was desperately struggling to fly, but could not free itself from the fishing line tangled around its wings and feet. The bird had a fishing hook in its mouth!" says Mr. Wilson. Desperately trying to find someone to help the bird, Wilson finally located a Harbor Patrol officer who responded to the emergency. Mr. Wilson reports, "Harbor Patrol did a great job of trying to help the bird. Unfortunately, the Pelican was able to fly away before the Harbor Patrol was able to return to the scene to remove the hook and line. It was a very frantic situation. There were no signs on the Pier with relevant information on what to do or who to call. I was already aware of this type of problem...a friend of mine witnessed a similar event at the Pier recently in which two men were intentionally trying to hook a seabird using a baited hook. This appears to be a real problem here at Port San Luis Pier."

Monofilament fishing line, hooks, lures and other plastics are one of the primary threats to seabirds and other marine life here on the Central Coast. Pacific Wildlife Care, SLO county's primary wildlife rescue organization, handles the majority of the calls to rescue these type of injured birds. Vice President, Andrea Muentner notes that PWC rehabilitates many birds and other wildlife injured as a result of fishing tackle injuries at their in-care facilities, while many other rescues are performed on-site at Central Coast beaches. California Brown Pelicans, sea gulls, terns, cormorants and even southwestern pond turtles are among some of the animals treated by PWC for fishing tackle injuries.

Rescue organizations recommend if you accidentally hook a bird while fishing, to gently reel in the bird and remove the hook. In more cases than not, simply cutting the line is sentencing the Pelican or other type of seabird to a gruesome death. The fishing line will likely become entangled in their wings and legs and they will not be able to fly. Or, they can initially fly but later become entangled in trees where they then starve to death. Even a piece of fishing line as small as 10 inches can kill seabirds and hooks usually cause infection unless removed quickly. If you need assistance with rescue, contact Pacific Wildlife Care (805-543-WILD, www.pacificwildlifecare.org).

As a result of the overwhelming number of injured marine animals on the Central Coast

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and the amount of fishing tackle and other debris left on piers, a new organization has formed to tackle the problem. The group, Pier Watch, has dedicated its efforts to educating the public, removing fishing line and other debris from Central Coast piers and working with local officials to install informational signs on Piers and at beaches. The group is in the process of purchasing steel signs, which are currently in wide use at other beaches around the country. "Providing the public with information is an inexpensive and effective means to prevent injuries to seabirds and other marine animals. The signs will include local area information of who to call for rescue assistance, how to help a bird if it is injured, and who to call to report harassment of any marine animal" reports a Pier Watch representative. "This project is a collaboration of concerned residents, responsible fisherman and volunteer rescue organizations. We are hopeful that city and other officials will support our efforts and the installation of these signs on Central Coast piers."

What you can do to help:

The California Brown Pelican and other marine animals compliment the natural beauty of the Central Coast attracting both area residents and visitors alike. Help keep our piers clean, safe and an enjoyable place to fish. When fishing, make sure not to leave fishing lines or hooks behind, use barb-less hooks (which hold fish as well, but are easier to remove from the flesh of impaled birds) and never leave a line unattended. If you find abandoned fishing line or tackle on the Pier or beach, be sure to throw it away. For assistance with rescue of injured birds or wildlife in SLO county call Pacific Wildlife Care at 805-543-WILD, report injured marine mammals to the Marine Mammal Center at 415-289-7325, report harassment of marine animals to the California Department of Fish and Game CALtip at 1-800-952-5400.

For more information, to sponsor a sign or to volunteer with "Pier Watch", email info@pierwatch.com or visit our website: www.pierwatch.com

Throwing plastic into the ocean and harassment of marine animals is against the law. The California Brown Pelican is protected under the Endangered Species Act and the Migratory Bird Act. Fines for harming them are severe: as much as \$50,000 and possibly a year in jail. California sea otters are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Endangered Species Act and California state law. Killing them is illegal, and harassing them can carry fines of up to \$10,000.

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For additional information and/or full size photographs contact:
Pier Watch: www.pierwatch.com. Pier watch is an all-volunteer group dedicated to the protection of Central Coast beaches, Piers and marine life by increasing public awareness.