



Audubon FLORIDA

For immediate release  
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## Sarasota Bay's Bird Nesting Islands Need Help

*Annual fishing line cleanup to take place on September 29, 2012.*

Sarasota, FL - The Annual Fishing Line Cleanup Day, sponsored by Sarasota Bay Watch, Audubon Florida, and Save Our Seabirds will take place on Saturday, September 29th. Each year, thousands of feet of fishing line become entangled on Sarasota Bay's bird nesting islands and shorelines and pose a fatal hazard to birds and other wildlife. This cleanup event reduces the threat of entanglement, while recycling the fishing line.

"Cleanups mobilize the people who love and use the bay the most to help us clear important nesting habitat of dangerous fishing line," said Andy Mele, Executive Director, Sarasota Bay Watch. "This event is a great way for folks to be good stewards of Sarasota Bay, and save a lot of iconic Florida birds in the process," added Mark Rachal, Sanctuary Manager for Audubon Florida.

To register for the free event, visit the Sarasota Bay Watch website: [www.sarasotabaywatch.org](http://www.sarasotabaywatch.org). Boaters are encouraged to attend, kayaks are welcome, and there are routes for people traveling by car and on foot.

Volunteer registration is required for the September 29th event, which runs from 8:30 AM to 12:30 PM. All volunteers will meet at 8:30 AM at the Sarasota Sailing Squadron, 1717 Ken Thompson Parkway on City Island to go over the cleanup instructions and receive their equipment, data sheets and maps. Additionally, Lee Fox of Save Our Seabirds will provide a demonstration using a live bird on how to free entangled birds volunteers may encounter during the cleanup, or where to transport injured birds for rehabilitation.

When the volunteers have completed the cleanup, they will return to Sarasota Sailing Squadron to weigh their retrieved fishing gear and turn in all equipment and data sheets. Lunch will be provided, courtesy of the Sarasota Sailing Squadron and Sarasota Bay Watch.

*Sarasota Bay Watch is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to protecting and restoring Sarasota Bay's ecosystem through community education and citizen participation. To learn more about Sarasota Bay Watch, visit [www.sarasotabaywatch.org](http://www.sarasotabaywatch.org).*

*Audubon Florida and the National Audubon Society are dedicated to protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them. Audubon's national network of community-based nature centers and chapters, scientific and educational programs, and advocacy on behalf of areas sustaining important bird populations, engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in conservation. For more information, please visit [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org) or [fl.audubon.org](http://fl.audubon.org), or call 813-623-6826.*

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**Photo opportunities:** Media is welcome to join us for the monofilament cleanup. Please contact Andy Mele at 914-204-0030 or email at [andymele@mac.com](mailto:andymele@mac.com) to coordinate.



## Fishing Line Entanglement Fact Sheet

Fishing line is a significant mortality factor in bird colonies. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission biologists have identified fishing line as the number one killer of adult brown pelicans. Although estimates of the total annual impact are very imprecise, hundreds and possibly thousands of birds die annually in Florida from this unnecessary cause.

“The birds face increasing pressures from habitat loss, storm damage, and predation; removing fishing line is an easy way to help their chance of survival,” said Audubon Florida Sanctuary Manager Mark Rachal.

Sarasota Bay and the gulf coast are home to some of the most important bird nesting colonies in the state of Florida. A wide variety of birds are affected by fishing line, including those that nest in trees (pelicans, cormorants, anhingas, herons and egrets, ibis, spoonbills, etc.) and others that nest on the ground (gulls, terns, skimmers, and oystercatchers). Many of these species are listed by the State of Florida as “Threatened” or “Species of Special Concern.” One species, the wood stork, is federally listed as “Endangered.” Although many of the nesting and roosting sites are protected or closed to the public, fishing line often accumulates in these areas and birds unnecessarily die. If the line enters the water, it can indiscriminately kill fish, dolphins and manatees as well.

Birds may become entangled in fishing line in a number of ways including: becoming hooked when pursuing an angler’s bait or lure; lining their nests with discarded fishing line snarls; becoming entangled in an abandoned snagged line. In all of these cases, the outcome is fatal for the birds.

The annual fishing line cleanup is scheduled during the fall only, outside of the main colonial waterbird nesting season. It is important that volunteers do not disturb nesting birds and register for the fishing line cleanup or contact Audubon Florida (813-623-6826) before cleaning a site to make sure they have permission to enter any posted island. It is also important for the public to understand that entering the colony islands at other times of the year may impact nesting birds, inadvertently causing injury and/or death of the chicks.

Individuals or groups who wish to participate but cannot attend the September 29<sup>th</sup> Fishing Line Cleanup Day are welcome to contact us to arrange for pick-ups, shoreline adoptions and other special arrangements.

Audubon Florida: Mark Rachal or Ann Paul, 813-623-6826.

Sarasota Bay Watch: Andy Mele or Ronda Ryan, 914-204-0030

- Each year, thousands of feet of fishing gear carelessly abandoned by fishermen becomes entangled on Florida’s Gulf Coast shorelines and estuaries to pose a fatal hazard to coastal waterbirds, fish, turtles, and marine mammals.

- Because modern fishing line does not readily decompose, it can continue to damage wildlife for decades or longer. Fishing gear collects in critical wildlife habitats including mangrove shorelines, coastal cordgrass marshes, and seagrass beds, where wildlife become snared.
- Coastal wildlife species killed in abandoned fishing gear include manatees, dolphins, sharks and other fish, sea turtles, and birds, especially Brown Pelicans, herons and egrets, ibis, gulls, terns, skimmers, and plovers.
- Biologists have estimated that 80% of the Brown Pelicans in Florida are injured by fishing equipment during their lifespan and that 500 or more pelicans are killed annually after contact with fishing tackle. Pelicans entangled in fishing line or caught by fishing hooks generally cannot forage efficiently, and so die of starvation, or become snared in trees when they roost, and hang helplessly while they die of dehydration.



Dr. Randy Runnels, FDEP staff, in a mangrove with a dead Brown Pelican, killed by entangled fishing line, Terra Ceia Bay.  
Photo: Libby Carnahan



Fishing line and cork bobber in a Brown Pelican nest.  
Photo: Audubon files

- Birds that build stick nests use finer material to line their nests to provide a soft and warm layer to protect the eggs and chicks. As discarded fishing line often washes up on shorelines, it is often accidentally collected with cordgrass or other marsh grasses by adults and added to the nest structure. There, fishing line can ensnare the adult birds as they attend the young or the chicks themselves, causing injury or death.
- Brown Pelicans and gulls feeding near fishing piers sometimes catch baited line. When this happens, the fisherman often cuts the line, instead of reeling in the hooked pelican or gull and setting it free. In most cases, the long length of line connected to the hooked bird becomes tangled in vegetation once the bird returns to its roost site. Even after that bird is dead, line strung across mangroves or salt marshes can snare and kill more birds for years.



Audubon staff with birds killed by single fishing line in a coastal marsh nesting colony at the mouth of Tampa Bay.  
Photo: Peter Clark



Roseate Spoonbill killed by fishing line.  
Photo: Mark Rachal