



<http://cbs2.com/topstories/local_story_201184413.html>
video: <http://www.cbs2.com/video/?id=22101@kcbs.dayport.com>

clock Jul 20, 2006 3:39 pm US/Pacific
Pelican Convicted Of Flying Drunk Crashes Again

(CBS) CORONA DEL MAR A California Brown Pelican named "Crash" for diving into a car windshield after ingesting tainted algae earned her nickname again Thursday, smacking into some rocks when released into the wild.

Despite the early stumble, "Crash" recovered and eventually soared away.

The bird was one of 11 pelicans released at Big Corona Beach by staff from the Wetlands and Wildlife Care Center in Huntington Beach. "Crash" was distinguished by a red dot on her beak, according to Debbie McGuire, wildlife director of the center.

As all the birds were set free, the other 10 immediately flew off, but Crash lingered.

When she finally took the plunge, she went beak-first onto the rocks below, but picked herself up, shook her tail and then bobbed away in the surf.

"This morning, she did four or five flights around her cage," Lisa Birkle, the center's assistant wildlife director, told reporters. "She can fly. She probably doesn't have her strength up yet."

"So she got a scrape, or a bump or a bruise," Birkle said. "It's nothing compared to what she got going through the car window and she will be fine."

McGuire said the large bird was distracted by her public debut.

"What happened was, there were so many cameras," McGuire said. "She looked back and then took a step."

KCAL9 reported that Crash remained bobbing around in the water for nearly 20 minutes and when she did fly, she remained low over the water.

According to the report, staff was concerned enough to consider catching her again but she flew off.

McGuire said the staff "just wanted to make sure she was flying well."

"She took off just fine and she was flying really well," McGuire said.

Crash was injured on June 22 when she crashed head-on into the windshield of a car on Pacific Coast Highway in Laguna Beach. She suffered a four-inch gash in her pouch, which was stitched up, and her right toe was stabilized with a pin that was later removed, McGuire said.

Officials said the bird showed symptoms of Domoic Acid poisoning, including general disorientation and acting "drunk," she said.

McGuire said that of the 10 other pelicans released Thursday, about half were injured by fishing lines or hooks and the other half were young and had not eaten well.

The ocean water is four degrees warmer than normal, which causes fish to swim deeper in the ocean. Young birds do not realize they have to dive deeper to eat, she said.

The birds are born on the Channel Islands, then the young ones must fly the 26 miles to the mainland, which leaves them weakened when fish are deeper in the ocean and hard to get.

The ocean will get colder, McGuire said, and conditions will return to normal.

Brown pelicans are an endangered species that are protected, but the government is seeking to de-list them from that status because they have made a comeback from their dwindled numbers caused by DDT poisoning years ago, Birkle said.

(© 2006 CBS Broadcasting Inc. All Rights Reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed. The Associated Press contributed to this report.)