

If you've caught too many bait fish, throw them back in for the next time! Don't feed them to the birds!

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 **Audubon** FLORIDA

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What to do if you hook a pelican!



Catch fish, not pelicans! With just a little extra attention to your surroundings, you and your pelican friends can both have a great day out on the water.

The brown pelican is now a common sight on the coasts. Pelicans eat smaller fish that are not preferred by recreational fishermen and that are not commercially important. Pelicans are protected by federal and state laws.

A brown pelican's keen eyesight allows it to spot fish from high in the air. Plunge-diving for fish is their specialty. After surfacing and draining water from its pouch, the pelican swallows its well-deserved catch. Even though pelicans are large birds with broad wingspans, their feathers and hollow bones are very light, exquisitely designed for agile and expert flight.

Entanglement in fishing gear may be their number one enemy, leading to slow death from dehydration and starvation. Bony fish scraps are also a killer, tearing the pouch or lodging in the throat. Feeding pelicans draws them to fishing areas and puts them in danger. Shorebirds, storks, herons, terns and gulls are also casualties. We can all help keep pelicans alive and healthy.

TIPS TO HELP our pelican friends

- Casting near any bird only increases the chances of hooking one. Birds focus on the injured fish in a school, which is your lure or baited fish. Pelicans dive for fish on the surface of the water or just below it. When fishing, never cast towards any bird.
- Don't feed the filleted bony carcasses to the birds, even if they are begging for them. Pelicans and other fish-eating birds such as herons and egrets easily digest the bones of small fish, but they can be severely injured by the stronger, sharp bones of the bigger fish you have caught. Carcass bones may puncture the pouch, throat, or intestines, leading to infection and a slow, painful death.
- It is illegal to feed wildlife in all state parks.
- Don't feed your extra bait fish to the birds. Feeding attracts birds to fishing areas, where they are more likely to become hooked.
- Always discard your old or tangled fishing line in recycling bins or covered trash cans. Birds and other wildlife become entangled leading to entrapment, strangulation, starvation, loss of limb, or subject to easy predation.
- Don't leave your fishing pole unattended as accidental entanglement may occur.
- Lead or zinc weighted jigs, lures, and tackle are deadly toxic. Instead use stainless steel, tin, tungsten, copper, pewter or brass, porcelain or stone fishing gear.

What to do if you hook a pelican

Although its wingspan is over 6 ½ feet, a pelican weighs only 8-10 pounds and your fishing line test will hold it. Note: the bird won't know you are trying to help and will try to defend itself. Pelicans do not have teeth, but they have a hook at the beak's tip and its edges are sharp and could give you a small "paper" cut.

IMPORTANT, NEVER CUT THE LINE IF YOU CATCH A PELICAN.

1. Enlist a partner to help you release the bird. Extra hands and tools are useful. Put on sunglasses or other eye protection.
2. Reel the bird in slowly and evenly. Jerking the line will increase injury.



3. Grasp the bird firmly. Cover the bird's head with a towel, shirt, or your hat to calm it.
4. Hold the beak firmly and slightly open so the pelican can breathe easily. Fold the wings gently and firmly against the bird's body.

If you hook an egret, heron, or cormorant, extra care to protect yourself is needed because their sharp beaks can inflict injury. Enlist a partner to help you and put on sunglasses, goggles, or other eye protection. Grasp the bird firmly, controlling the head first. Cover the head with a towel to calm it. Hold the head behind the eyes, fold up the wings, and grab the legs to control the feet and toes.

5. **ALWAYS REMOVE THE HOOK BY CUTTING THE BARB.** This reduces injury. Carefully push the barb forward to expose it and cut the barb off with wire cutters.



6. Back the rest of the hook out.
7. Before you let the pelican go, carefully check it over for other hooks and fishing line. Gently unfold each wing, one at a time, to examine the bird for line or hooks.
8. If the bird is not seriously wounded, release it immediately. To release the bird, point its head towards the water, away from you, and step back. Let it fly away on its own.



9. If the bird is seriously injured, lethargic, or has swallowed the hook, it should be taken to a veterinarian or wildlife rehabilitator. Call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission 1-888-404-3922 for a list of rehabilitators.