



Danny and Ruth Hernandez of West Palm Beach and their grandson George Young, 4, watch as a pelican they released from a pet carrier runs to fly out to the ocean from the shoreline of Carlin Park in Jupiter on Friday. "I grew up surfing in these waters, so it's nice to be able to give back," said Danny Hernandez. ERIC HASERT/TCPALM

Six rehabbed pelicans released after 2 months

Ed Killer Treasure Coast Newspapers
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JUPITER – For six brown pelicans, freedom was only a few flaps of their wings away. Two adult and four juvenile pelicans were released back into the wild April 9 by volunteers and friends of the Busch Wildlife Sanctuary, a wildlife hospital and education center headquartered in Jupiter since 1983.

For nearly two months, the pelicans were patients at the sanctuary's wildlife hospital. Some had been treated for injuries incurred after they became entangled in fishing gear. The others were treated for exhaustion, probably as a re-

sult of migrating, explained Stephanie Franczak, hospital director at Busch Wildlife.

Freedom Friday

The release was the end of a week's worth of wildlife releases by sanctuary staff, Franczak said. Prior to the pelican release, staff had turned loose four screech owls, about 15 squirrels, 15 possums and a few songbirds.

"Freedom Friday and Freedom Week are our favorite hashtags here," Franczak said.

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A brown pelican with a hook in its bill and injuries under its wing was brought in to Busch Wildlife Sanctuary this month.

PROVIDED BY BUSCH WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Pelicans

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The pelicans were transported to the beach at Carlin Park in small carriers, one bird per carrier. As soon as their doors were opened by volunteers, five pelicans immediately flew due east, landing softly on the flat, calm, turquoise water of the Atlantic Ocean only two dozen yards from shore.

One adult, however, quickly summed up the situation. He could easily see scores of his feathered friends diving into the ocean on a school of baitfish just beyond the trough along the shoreline. He arched upward at the tide line, angled his wings to the south and toward one group of feeding pelicans.

He pulled his wings in tight to his torso and plunged head first into the water for his first free meal as a newly wild pelican.

MASH unit

By midday April 5, the hospital staff at Busch Wildlife Sanctuary had solemn frowns behind their face masks. As they attended to a variety of different birds and animals, it was apparent they were going to have a hard time keeping up with the pace of the wildlife coming in through the front door.

"We already had 40 animals brought in since 8 a.m.," Allison Malkiewicz, a Busch Wildlife hospital technician with two years' experience said. Malkiewicz added they are in the midst of what they call "baby season."

It's when animals and birds are having their young and people find them injured, knocked out of nests or orphaned and bring them in. These animals often require more care for longer to get to an age when they can be released.

The hospital has received 1,257 admissions just through the first 13 weeks of 2021. In recent years, Busch Wildlife has taken in this many animals:

- 2020 — 5,681
- 2019 — 5,213
- 2018 — 4,590

The hospital receives from concerned citizens animals of all kinds including:

- Birds
- Alligators
- Turtles
- Possums
- Snakes
- Squirrels
- Foxes
- Rabbits

Shorebirds make up a significant number of admitted animals. This year, the hospital has taken in:

- Pelican — 27
- Gulls — 30
- Gannets — 8
- Herons — 13
- Ibis — 7

It is the goal of the hospital to return all animals back to the wild, unless the animal is injured beyond the point where it can't survive.

Some animals do not survive their injuries. Injuries can include natural causes like exhaustion and illness, or human-made causes.

Intensive care

The rate at which animals arrive at Busch Wildlife's hospital is staggering. Executive Director Amy Kight explains that once the animal is delivered, the care process is often longer, more intensive and more expensive than most people understand.

"A lot of times when people bring in a bird, they think it's just a hook, so we're just going to pop that hook out and send the bird back on their way," Kight said. "That's often not the case. By the time



A pelican takes a flight to freedom off the shoreline of Carlin Park on Friday in Jupiter after being released back to its natural habitat. Six pelicans were rehabilitated at the Busch Wildlife Sanctuary and released from temporary pet carriers during a brief ceremony at the park. ERIC HASERT/TCPALM

they are rescued, you're dealing with emaciation, dehydration, parasites — which start to take over internally and externally because their immune system is under stress — and we usually have no way of knowing how long the bird has been injured or entangled. So we have to remove the foreign body, the hook and then we have to get them eating again, rehydrate them, treat parasites. Sometimes, there can be long-lasting damage."

Malkiewicz said it takes a lot of time for the birds and animals to rehabilitate far enough to make it in the wild once released.

"Sometimes they are here more than a month," Malkiewicz said. "First, they sit inside for about two weeks or more getting treatment. Then we have to take them to outside cages to get their strength back."

Care, please

Kight said use care if you are fishing so you don't accidentally hook a bird or animal.

"If you do happen to hook anything, don't remove it yourself and don't cut the line 3 inches long," Kight said. "Leave a nice amount of line and get the animal to a wildlife facility."

Kight said to remember the injury is painful and it can cause infection.

"It needs to be removed with the same kind of courtesy and kindness that you would want if you were hooked and went to hospital for help," Kight said.

Anglers should always be careful when casting lines near shorebirds, and never leave discarded line or hooks behind, or throw them overboard. Put used fishing line in a proper fishing line recycling container or closed trash receptacle.

Not cheap

The care for these animals, Kight explained, is not cheap. For example, it can cost more than \$280 to nurse a possum back to health, \$1,250 for a raccoon and nearly \$1,500 for a fox. "Many people don't realize we're not government funded. We operate our hospital almost completely on donations from individuals and the community," Kight said.

Donations are needed now more than ever as the Busch Wildlife Sanctuary prepares to relocate to a larger facility in Jupiter Farms, five miles west of its present location on the grounds of the Loxahatchee River District.

Kight said the expansion is much-needed, trading the six acres the facility is on with 19.6 acres at the new site. The move is expected to cost about \$13 million and they are aiming for a March 2022 move, she said.

"We'll be able to triple the size of our hospital to about 4,000 square feet. We'll have the space to give our patients the time to get from critical care to therapy and then to flying and running and catching food. We will be better able to prepare them for the wild."

Most of the land will not be cleared and left natural to include boardwalks and enable visitors to see what real Florida is like, Kight added.

As for the released pelicans, neither Busch Wildlife staff — nor certainly the pelicans — want to see them return to the hospital there.

Busch Wildlife Sanctuary

- Where: 2500 Jupiter Park Drive, Jupiter
- When: Open for visitors 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Closed Sundays and some holidays.
- Free, but donations are requested.

• Online: buschwildlife.org, Facebook at facebook.com/BuschWildlife and Instagram at [@buschwildlife](https://instagram.com/@buschwildlife).

• To donate to the sanctuary's capital campaign go to buschwildlife.org/capital-campaign.

What to do when you have found an injured animal

• Call closest animal hospital or Busch Wildlife Sanctuary for assistance at 561-575-3399

• Use common sense; think of your safety first

- Try to contain the animal
- Keep the animal warm and quiet
- Do not pet or handle the animal
- Do not try to feed or give water to the animal

• If reporting an injured manatee, dolphin or sea turtle, call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 888-404-3922.

When rescuing a wild animal: Your first thought may be to comfort the creature and provide it with food. However, handling an injured animal can cause stress, and feeding can cause harm. The diets of wild animals are very complex, so it is better to do as little as possible until you can get the animal to a wildlife rehabilitation facility.

Animal drop-off: The Busch Wildlife Sanctuary's wildlife hospital is available to receive injured animals from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Sunday. Arrangements for later drop-off can sometimes be accommodated if made in advance.

Call the sanctuary at 561-575-3399. If it is after normal business hours, you will be directed to an emergency number.

— Busch Wildlife Sanctuary