

Discarded piece of plastic leads to death of rescued duck

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Wildlife rescuers are urging Coquitlam residents to pick up their litter and that of others, after a massive community effort to save a distressed duck last week proved to be in vain.

Jane Thomsing, care centre liaison for the Wildlife Rescue Association of B.C., said she spent three days at Como Lake chasing down a mallard duck last week, after a passerby noticed the bird struggling with an orange plastic ring wrapped around its neck and bill.



Centre staff, community volunteers, Coquitlam Animal Shelter workers and Coquitlam firefighters finally cornered the injured bird, which was unable to eat properly, and brought it back to the centre last Wednesday for care.

CREDIT: NOW file photo

Volunteers spent days trying to capture this duck at Como Lake, after a passerby spotted it in distress with a plastic orange ring stuck around its neck and bill. Despite their efforts, the duck died days later at a wildlife rescue centre in Burnaby.

"Unfortunately the duck was quite anemic and emaciated when it came in, and it actually has passed away. It's pretty devastating," Thomsing said.

"Once they're entangled and if they're still mobile, catching them is the problem. Sometimes it takes a lot of time.

"The animal doesn't realize we're there to help it. Unfortunately it's not the happy ending story. It's really disappointing."

What concerns Thomsing, however, is that what happened to the mallard is not an isolated case.

"In Coquitlam there have been calls not just from Como Lake, but from Lafarge Lake about birds being entangled in fishing line," she said.

"We've had, over the years, quite a few different wildlife species come in that are injured or sick as a result of human garbage."

The same day the duck was captured in Coquitlam, Thomsing said, volunteers were bringing in a heron entangled in fishing line off the bank of the Pitt River.

"It was suffering from exhaustion because it kept trying to fly off, but was unable to because of the entanglement of the fishing line," she said. "He was completely weak, but fortunately hasn't sustained any critical injuries from the entanglement.

"Had nobody responded or seen it or called it in, it would still be there and it would almost be certain death."

Staff and volunteers at the Burnaby-based wildlife shelter nursed the heron back to health, and released it back into the wild Monday.

It's not just waterfowl impacted by garbage, either. Thomsing said the centre has recorded a spike in calls recently about skunks in distress.

Disposable drink cups from convenience stores and fast food outlets are an attractant for the little scavengers.

"We've had several skunks come in in the same predicament, with garbage wrapped around their necks," Thomsing said.

Lafarge and Como lakes are both popular watering holes for fishers and learn-to-fish programs.

Thomsing said the association doesn't take issue with those recreational programs, but hopes the community at large will take ownership of its green spaces to prevent injuries to wildlife by picking up discarded bits of fishing line and other litter.

"Unfortunately, it only takes one person to be irresponsible," she said. "In my mind, people have to stop assuming someone's going to pick up after them.

"My advice to people is that, even if it's not your litter and you notice it, pick it up. Yes, it's not yours, but you could be helping our wildlife by picking up these plastic rings."

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