



# Western Australian Seabird Rescue Newsletter - November 2021



## Herdsman Lake Pelican Rescue and deliberate Oil Spill

When a sharp-eyed bird photographer and concerned member of the public called our rescue line late on the 10th of October, they had sighted a Pelican, which is usually snowy white, sitting on the shore looking unwell, with a dark brown plumage.

### Oil spill

WA Seabird Rescue volunteers immediately suspected an oil spill, and they sprang into action! The next day our volunteers took kayaks to Herdsman Lake to see if they could capture the poor bird. It was cold and windy, and they could not locate it.

Reports from other concerned members of the public started coming through to our rescue line on the 12th of October, and they thought they may have discovered a new species of pelican.

Our intrepid volunteers once again braved wet and windy conditions to see if they could get closer. By this stage, the affected pelican was swimming with a flock of clean birds.

Another call that afternoon from our original caller placed the pelican in a flooded grassy area.

### A second Pelican

Rowan and Maxine decided that this might be their chance. When they arrived, there was not one but two oiled pelicans. The weather had not improved, but with sheer determination, a lot of water and mud, and a great backup team Rowan managed to get one of the pelicans. The other swam away.



### WA Wildlife

The pelican was taken straight to WA Wildlife for assessment and treatment. Dr Meg, the vet at WAW, ran some quick checks and confirmed that there were no signs of burns, so it was most likely to be dumped cooking oil, not petroleum-based oil.



The calls kept coming in about the pelican that got away, so Rowan made another visit, accompanied by Mary to see if they could lure it ashore with fish. No, go. The pelicans at Herdsman were not accustomed to fishers.



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## Oil sighted by DBCA

On the 13th of October, we got a call from a DBCA worker who said the pelican was sitting on the shore and that he had sighted orange-coloured oil in the canals alongside Jon Sanders Drive a few weeks ago. DBCA had reported the spill to authorities. The oil was obviously from a commercial kitchen, and it was contained in an area blocked by a boom. The birds still had access to it.



## Authorities not interested

Halina phoned the City of Stirling, who said they had no jurisdiction, and they wouldn't take down the details or forward them on. She then filled in an online notification form. Meanwhile Rowan had been phoning the Water Corporation to try and get some action. Another volunteer had notified Christine Tonkin MLA, the member for Churchlands. The authorities were frustratingly slow to act.

## The second and third capture

The second pelican was so badly oiled, she couldn't fly. She was caught using a leg line and some more sheer determination by our amazing volunteers, Rowan and Mary and an enthusiastic member of the public. A third pelican was later captured but was not as oily as the first two.

The three pelicans were warmed, washed, and fed at WA Wildlife (WAW) and spent a total of 10 days in care.

The oil exposure meant the birds lost their natural waterproofing. The water had seeped into their skin, causing them to feel cold and miserable. They had been unable to feed or get into the water, so

they were kept in care until they could swim and feed again with no problems.



## Release Day

Release day was the 24th of October, and the conditions were beautiful. A stark contrast to the wild and woolly rescue days! The three oiled pelicans were picked from WAW in Bibra Lake along with one other, for release into Herdsman Lake. The birds were looking magnificent. Their plumage was white, and the treatment had restored their health.



## Repeat Rescue

The release was a great success, and it was lovely to see the three pelicans and a buddy swim off in pairs and beginning to fish for themselves. So, you can imagine our distress when two of the birds had to be rescued again after a heavy downpour saw more oil appear in the drains. The birds were once again covered in orange oil! They were very wary by this stage and not as easy to catch as the last time.





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## Environmental vandalism

WASR is very concerned about this act of environmental vandalism and its danger to our fragile wildlife and the beautiful Herdsman Lake. Herdsman Lake is one of the few natural wetlands left in Perth, and we are fortunate to have it.

Our frustration comes from the slow reaction to the oil pollution event. It was only after WASR had rescued the bright orange oiled pelicans and started sharing photos widely that a boom was installed. This limited the spread of oil into the lake but did not prevent the local waterbirds from entering the 'oil lake'. It took further calls to prompt the authorities to pump out the toxic water.

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) Pollution Response team acted promptly once notified.

This has been a 'dress rehearsal for a larger oil spill or pollution event. We hope the different government departments will better coordinate their efforts next time.

We are grateful for Channel 7, 9 and 10 and ABC, who all picked up the story. Since then, DWER has used drones to try and trace the source of the oil.

The best outcome would be if they found the culprit and prosecuted them.

We are immensely grateful for the vigilance shown by members of the public and the work that our tireless volunteers do to keep our water birds safe.

**24 Hour Pollution Watch Hotline:** [1300 784 782](tel:1300784782)

**DWER Contaminated Sites Hotline:** [1300 762 982](tel:1300762982)

## Donations

There are several ways you can donate to Western Australian Seabird Rescue:

Direct Bank Transfer:

*Name: Western Australian Seabird Rescue*

*BSB: 633 000*

*A/C No: 139577217*

or

<https://www.givenow.com.au/wasr>

or via cheque made out to "Western Australian Seabird Rescue"

*For tax deductible donations: Online through WAWRC at:*

<https://www.wawrc.org.au/>

*Specify your donation is for WASR*

*Our Containers for Change Scheme ID is C10280268*

*You can also purchase our Pelican Pins online*

<https://wasr.org.au/product/pelican-pin/>



## Contact details:

*Western Australian Seabird Rescue*

*PO Box 43*

*Bayswater WA 6933*

*Phone: (06)61028464*

*Email: [info@wasr.org.au](mailto:info@wasr.org.au)*

*Web: <https://wasr.org.au>*

*Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/wasr.org.au>*

