

Mallard duck rescued from monofilament line entanglement

by *Duston Beyer*

It's really the little things we do in our daily jobs that give us an opportunity to share interesting stories, reflect on lessons learned, or inform the public of what we are experiencing out in the field. One of these examples was an opportunity to disentangle a trapped bird which was wrapped up in discarded fishing line.

On Wednesday, September 16th, 2009, I was asked to help with an injured bird call, and went out with Refuge wildlife biologist Liz Jozwiak to the Soldotna Visitors Center, where I put away my gun and badge and instead became a bird rescuer for about an hour.

Liz and I headed down the boardwalk to where both, the Visitor center staff, and several visitors had reported a Mallard duck in "distress" entangled in monofilament fishing line in the Kenai River. The bird was desperately trying to free himself from the fishing line, to no avail, as the line that was wrapped tightly around his neck and body, and had also become entangled on a submerged log, and each struggle tightened the noose and drew him closer to submersion.

I was the one with the hip waders in easy reach, so I jumped into the water and approached the duck with net and scissors in hand. I freed the bird from the log, and then handed him up to Liz who carefully removed the tightly wrapped line from about his neck and gave him a thorough "bill to webbed foot" checkup.

Once Liz was certain there were no other injuries, I took him to the water's edge and released him back into the wild. It was an awesome thing to see this beautiful bird take flight to join the others nearby. If it wasn't for the concerned citizens who found the entangled bird, and the staff of the Soldotna Visitor's Center who took the time to give the Kenai NWR a call, the situation could have had a much more "fowl" outcome!! It was actually even more awesome to see

the joy on the faces of those people who reported the incident, and were able to see a happy ending; the return of the freed bird to his normal life once more.

I want to take the time to thank the public who showed concern and who offered assistance when needed. This also brings me to my reasons for mentioning this bird in my article. I believe that if more people would take the time to pick up spent fishing line and lures they see on shore, then less wildlife would be entangled.

It is these secondary or hidden effects that do the most harm to our wildlife population long after the fishing season ends. Earlier this year, Liz mentioned that a bald eagle was reported injured along the Kasilof River. It had a Quikfish lure that was hooked onto its tongue and the second hook embedded into its right wing so it could no longer feed or fly. Once again, a concerned citizen reported the incident, and the bird was captured, and the multiple hooks removed. Unfortunately, we do not always see a happy ending to many of these situations which are not seen or reported.

We are hoping to work with other cooperating agencies next season, such as Alaska State Parks, the U.S. Forest Service, and several Kenai River Watch groups to once again install recycling boxes for used lures and monofilament line next season along high public use shorelines. We should also do our part in educating the users of rivers of the lasting effects of discarded line and lures, and keep our watersheds free of trash for everyone's enjoyment, and for the safety of the birds as well.

Duston Beyer is a law enforcement officer at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Previous Refuge Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.