

Needless and senseless painful deaths

By Ann Hall / Special to the [Sun Times](#)

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Last week, my column was about celebration of life.

It saddens me that this week I must focus on needless deaths -- deaths caused by human failure to retrieve fishing line and hooks.

Larry Barnhart, a resident of Capri for more than 35 years, showed up in my driveway with a photo and bottle of fishing line and hooks that he and his friend Gary Crum retrieved from mangrove trees off Capri last week.

Barnhart was heartbroken, and so was I after seeing the picture of a beautiful, innocent brown pelican that had fallen victim to lines and hooks left by careless fishermen.

Loves to fish

Barnhart himself loves fishing, as does his friend, Crum.

My husband and I also like to fish in the tranquil waters of Capri in hopes of finding a fresh catch to put on the table for dinner.

We have no animosity toward fishermen for sport or recreation when they follow the laws of the water and demonstrate respect for nature in their environment.

There are numerous documented stories of needless and cruel deaths to all sorts of wildlife caused by man's carelessness, whether deliberate or unknowingly.

Fishing paraphernalia can injure animals in a variety of ways.

Birds fly into line caught in trees and become entangled.

The more they struggle to free themselves, the more trapped they become. Most will slowly starve to death.

When they are caught in lower branches of trees, they usually end up hanging upside down and drown. Many find the monofilament line wrapped tightly around their feet or wings and will often sever them in their struggle for freedom.

Some swallow lead sinkers and are poisoned, while others engulf plastics that they can't digest and die a slow and painful death.

Discarded tackle

By far, experts agree that the greatest threat to the safety and health of our waterfowl is not polluted water, but rather the fishing tackle carelessly discarded by fishermen.

More than 85 percent of the pelicans treated at Florida's [Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary](#) have injuries caused from hooks and fishing line.

These are the lucky ones: Most victims are never found.

All of us who fish will lose line at one time or another. Fishing tackle can easily snap when it becomes entangled in tree branches or rocks in the water during casting or bringing in a catch.

Even the smallest amount of line can add up to a huge problem for animals. Sometimes, it is impossible for us to remove lost lines as we would endanger our lives in doing so.

But wherever possible, we are responsible for retrieval of these would-be weapons.

What can we do?

We can help keep our rivers, beaches and other open spaces safe by removing fishing line and tackle when we lose it, and when we see that lost by others.

We can encourage our fishing buddies to do the same. If there are no receptacles nearby for discarding tackle safely, put it in a bag and secure it. Discard it in a sealed container in your garbage can upon returning from your outing.

Make it a point not to be part of the problem, but to be part of the solution by stamping out needless and painful death of our wildlife.

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