

## Keep the bay free of killer fishing line

By [Terry Tomalin](#), Times Outdoors Editor  
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### TIERRA VERDE

Fifteen years ago, Peter Clark would head to any of the local mangrove islands in Tampa Bay and find dead seabirds hanging from the trees. "It used to be pretty bad," Clark said as he motored up to a "bird" island near the Pinellas Bayway. "It seemed like every island we went to, we found dead birds." But on this warm October morning, Clark, the executive director of Tampa Bay Watch, was pleasantly surprised to find the frigate birds and pelicans resting peacefully in the tree tops. "Obviously, we are making a difference," he said.

### Fishing line kills

Monofilament fishing line is not biodegradable. A single piece of fishing line, left on a dock or pier by an irresponsible angler, can take hundreds of years to break down in the environment.

Fishing line is thin and, by design, nearly transparent. As a result, it is difficult for birds and marine mammals to spot it in the water.

Once entangled, a bird flies off to a nesting island, where the line often wraps around a tree limb. The bird then can't leave to feed, and it slowly starves to death. What's worse, another bird might come by and become entangled in the same piece of fishing line.

Other animals, such as sea turtles and dolphins, often accidentally ingest fishing line and tackle. One dead sea turtle recovered by volunteers during an international cleanup was found to have consumed 590 feet of heavy-duty fishing line.

### Recycle, recycle

Fishing line can end up in the water a variety of ways. One of the most common is when an angler accidentally hooks a bird — usually while casting or because the bird dived on live bait — and cuts the line. (If you do hook a bird, reel in carefully, cover the bird's eyes with a towel or T-shirt and unhook it.)

But probably more often, an angler cuts a "bird's nest" out of a fishing reel and places the tangled line in a garbage can. But fishing line is light, and it can easily blow out of a garbage can and end up in the water.

Even fishing line that ends up in the garbage dump can be picked up by passing seabirds and wind up killing other animals on the bird islands.

But in the early 1990s, as Tampa Bay Watch, Audubon of Florida and the Ocean Conservancy began cleaning up used fishing line from nesting areas, the Iowa-based Pure Fishing America, better known as Berkley, began collecting old monofilament line, melting it down into plastic pellets and using them to make other products such as tackle boxes.

### **Do your share**

While Tampa Bay's bird islands are in better shape than they were 10 years ago, there's still work to be done.

On Oct. 25, Tampa Bay Watch and Audubon of Florida will team up to remove monofilament line from island sanctuaries in Tampa Bay that serve 50,000 breeding pairs of 25 species of birds.

To volunteer, contact Rachel Arndt at (727) 867-8166 or [rarndt@tampabaywatch.org](mailto:rarndt@tampabaywatch.org) for collection packets and an area assignment for the event.

### **Helpful hints**

To recycle line on your own, mail it to Berkley. Call 1-800-237-5539 for information. You can also take spent line to participating tackle shops or deposit it in containers at many boat ramps and piers. For a list of collection bins, go to [www.fishinglinerecycling.org/bin\\_information.asp](http://www.fishinglinerecycling.org/bin_information.asp). Also, if you spot a injured marine mammal or turtle, call Florida's Wildlife Alert Program toll-free at 1-888-404-3922.

### **>>fast facts**

#### **Revealing cleanup**

Marine debris kills thousands of seabirds, marine mammals and turtles each year through entanglement and ingestion. In 2007, International Coastal Cleanup volunteers

found 237 ocean animals entangled in trash during the three-hour event, including 81 birds, 63 fish, 49 invertebrates, 30 mammals, 11 reptiles and one amphibian found entangled in fishing line, fishing nets, six-pack holders, plastic bags and balloon string. Source: [www.oceanconservancy.org](http://www.oceanconservancy.org)