



GOOSE FISHING

On January 6, 1999, Second Chance received a Canada goose from the Montgomery County Humane Society. The citizen who had delivered it to the shelter had noticed that it was having difficulty walking. The goose had been easy to catch and they were hoping someone could help it. We began our examination by checking the legs of our friend, but could find nothing wrong; the legs appeared to work perfectly. The goose was quite skinny, weighing only 5 pounds, but what was causing that?

As no injuries were obvious, we began a routine, full examination, starting with the goose's head. You can imagine our surprise when we were only able to open the goose's bill about an inch wide. It took only an instant to spot the fishhook, blackened with age that was fully imbedded in the bird's upper bill. The barb had hooked deeply into the left nostril of the goose and the tip was clearly visible – protruding through the inside of the upper palate. There was a length of fishing line attached to the hook that wrapped around under the beak. We could tell the line had been there a long time because a deep groove had been formed in the soft tissue of the goose's lower bill. We followed the line around, under the chin and into the right side of the mouth, where it promptly disappeared down the throat of the suffering goose. The line offered little resistance to our gentle tug, hopefully meaning no other hook was down the throat. We clipped the barb from the fishhook and lifted it from the left nostril.

As we carefully pulled the line out of the throat, we found a clump of grass and plant matter had tangled around a knot and had been blocking our goose's esophagus. The bird had been unable to position her neck in that graceful "S" shape and must have been in great discomfort. We immediately searched through the plant material for a sinker or hook that might have caused further damages we couldn't see, but were actually more concerned when we didn't find anything attached to the end of the line.

Was there a lead sinker still in her intestines? A hook in her stomach lining? Only an x-ray would answer that question. In the meantime, she was finally able to eat in comfort, and even yawn if she felt weary from her ordeal.

Dr. Hollifield, at Best Friend's Veterinary Hospital, answered our questions by giving the goose a quick trip to the x-ray machine. Our goose was lead-sinker and hook free! With our fear of lead poisoning or intestinal perforations laid to rest, we concentrated on fattening her up for freedom. She was a very calm goose, although she hissed at our approach, she submitted to being picked up and moved from cage to cage with no struggle – the kind of patient we all dream of. Soon, however, it was time to return to the wild.

As she strolled into the flock of geese near the lakeside, she never looked back. She headed straight for the water, to rid herself of the memory of captivity, and swam out deep enough to bathe. We were amazed, and amused, to watch her flip over, like a child doing summersaults in a swimming pool, her personal way of bathing. Twice she flipped head first, tail up and emerged cleaning and preening away, like she was doing a perfectly normal goose move. We had certainly saved an interesting character. Perhaps she'll bring us flipping babies this spring!

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