



A DUCK GOES HOME

By Chris Montuori

November 25, 1995, the citizen reported that his dog had drawn his attention to a duck or goose that appeared injured in Martin Luther King Park on Jackson Road, Silver Spring. At the time of the rescue, the citizen noticed a metal band on the duck's right leg. In addition to numbers, inscribed on the band were the words Avise Bird Band, Washington, D.C. The citizen was referred by the Park Police to SCWC.

On admission, the duck was quickly identified as a male canvasback. A diving duck, it was fairly unusual to find this type of waterfowl inland. There was a minor wound at the right wrist and a larger wound on the right side neat the shoulder which was bleeding rather heavily. There was considerable swelling from the wrist to the elbow along the right wing. After several hours of observation, it was decided to suture the shoulder wound to stop the bleeding. A regimen of antibiotics was begun.

In addition to the recent injuries, it was discovered that during the initial exam, the duck had lost about half of the left foot in a previous injury. This was obviously well-healed. Could this bird have been in rehab before? The band number was recorded and the duck was comfortably settled into a kennel.

On November 27, the rescue of the duck was reported to the Bird Banding Laboratory in Laurel, MD. We requested that the rescuer receive the standard Certificate of Appreciation which would indicate the age and sex of the bird as well as where, when and by whom the band had been affixed. Over the next several days, the duck's wounds healed well. Unfortunately, being a diving duck. The canvasback was less than impressed by our menu's content and presentation. It was necessary to feed the duck a balanced liquid diet with a stomach tube four times a day. I had noticed that the duck did not seem to walk around well on land but a quick consultation with Terry Moritz, a duck specialist in Baltimore, assured me that this was normal for this species. Many waterfowl, such as loons, grebes, mergansers and canvasbacks, are "fish out of water" on dry land. Unlike our familiar Mallard, whose legs are position pretty centrally on the body, these birds' legs are positioned so far to the rear that they are nearly or wholly unable to stand and walk on solid ground. Thus, the canvasback's impaired walking ability was not the result of injury. The duck spent many hours each day in a bathtub full of water to keep it comfortable and to maintain its waterproofing.

On Saturday, December 30, the duck was deemed fully healed, waterproof and ready for release. It was driven to Gibson Island, MD where a number of canvasbacks were known to live. Minutes after release, our now ex-patient noticed familiar silhouettes out on the water and made a beeline toward his kind. We could only cross our fingers and hope he would successfully integrate with this wild flock.

A few days later, I sent a note to the duck's rescuer advising him of the release and asking that he let me know the history of its banding when he received the notice from the Bird Banding Lab. I did not have long to wait. Within a few days, the citizen called and said the notice had indicated that the duck had probably hatched in 1987. It was banded in 1988 by Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Migratory Bird Research. Where had it been banded? Gibson Island, MD! Seven years after this canvasback was caught for banding, it wound up right back where it started. Through our contacts, SCWC found what we thought would be a good release site for this unusual diving duck. Only after the release did we learn how good a site it was!

P.S. Remember, if you even find a bird with a band that says Avise Bird Band, whether dead or alive, please report the number to the Bird Banding Laboratory, Laurel, MD, 301-497-5942. No matter where in this country, or the world, you may live, all Avise bird band recoveries help determine migration patterns, population levels and survival, especially of rehabilitated birds. The duck in our story, if initially banded following rehabilitation for its foot injury, had survived long enough following release to have bred and reproduced. Those of us in the rehabilitation field consider that to be a resounding success. Band recoveries help us legitimize and justify our work. If you have any questions concerning bird banding, please feel free to contact us.

P.P.S. Due to government shutdowns and furloughs, it was not until January 24, 1996 that the Bird Banding Laboratory was finally advised of this release.

Reprinted from "Second Thoughts" Newsletter-Spring 1996.
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