A Beauty of the Woodlands Nearly Killed by a Thoughtless Fast Food Consumer

By David Mead

Big Blue is the boss. She (at least we think it’s a she according to the Seaside Seabird Sanctuary hospital in Indian Shores) patrols the banks of the ponds in and around Quail Forest in East Lake Woodlands with a combination of agile grace, beauty and absolute authority that is a pleasure to watch.

Big Blue is a Great Blue Heron. She stands nearly five feet tall when her curved neck is fully extended, and commands the respect of the creatures who inhabit the ponds around here, including the anhinga, ibises, night herons, little blue herons, long-necked white egrets.
and yes, even alligators will not take on Big Blue. On top of it all, she is one beautiful bird.

Big Blue was nearly killed by a thoughtless human. Throwing the left-over plastic trash from a fast-food smoothie, not into one of many waste receptacles at their disposal, but into the wild, is disgusting. The plastic top of the smoothie container ended up in a pond area where Big Blue got it lodged on her beak, preventing her from eating.

Upon seeing the dilemma, neighbors tried for days to capture Big Blue to remove this horrible plastic from her beak knowing she would soon starve to death. But she was too clever, too fast and nearly impossible to catch.

After several unsuccessful attempts to capture her and cellphone calls and texts to various authorities and volunteers, a savior arrived. Fortunately, Big Blue was on the bank of the pond in sight.

Kim Begay, a volunteer and Consumer Advocate with the Clearwater Audubon Society, and her son Brandon arrived with all the knowledge and tools to try to capture Big Blue. Using a string snare launched with a fishing rod and many small fish as bait, Kim threw the fish up into the air and out on the ground to try to entice Big Blue. For a half an hour, Big Blue would have no part of the ruse, and ignored the fish. Finally, she started to walk toward several fish encircled by the snare. As soon as she stepped into the snare, Kim yanked on her line and caught Big Blue by the legs, preventing her from a quick get-away.
Brandon quickly ran out to the bird, grabbed her and held her securely.

Kim took several pictures of the plastic entanglement on Big Blue’s beak, identified the source (the Golden Arches cleverly stamped on the top made it easy) and cut it away from her beak. She put Big Blue in a carrier and drove her to the Seabird Sanctuary hospital in Indian Shores.

Kim texted us several times over the next few days about Big Blue’s condition. The first report was not good; she was near starvation. The doctor said she felt the bird had maybe one day left. Since then, however, Big Blue has made a strong recovery and regained her appetite. If all goes well, she will be released from the hospital back into Quail Forest in about a week.
Kim and Brandon are our heroes. This is a strictly volunteer effort driven by their love of wildlife. Their dedication has kept some of the natural beauty in this area, which is in dwindling supply, and saved the life of a beautiful creature.

Since the rescue, WFTS Action News, the Tampa ABC affiliate interviewed Kim, Carolyn Burgin and Patti Mead, who were with her when Big Blue was captured and were very involved in her rescue. The station played the interview on its news broadcast along with several pictures of Big Blue, including a video of the capture.

To contribute to this noble cause, please send any donations to: Seaside Seabird Sanctuary, 18328 Gulf Blvd, Indian Shores, FL 33785.

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Update to this saga. Big Blue was rehabbed by Seaside and spent over a week in its hospital. She has recovered and
was released on August 31 back into the wild in the ponds of Quail Forest.

Quail Forest residents who helped rescue Big Blue and “spotted” her for the week her beak was impaled in a drink lid: Carolyn Burgin, Pat and Dave Mead, Connie Talmadge.

Photos by Carolyn Burgin and Pat Mead.