

NEWS FROM THE ALASKA SEALIFE CENTER



Rescue photos by Wendy Doughty

At first, it looked like the happy ending everyone loves to watch: a trumpeter swan discovered in Tern Lake with an arrow pinning its wing to its side was rescued and released back into the wild on September 1.

The swan had been spotted several days earlier by bird watchers, who were shocked to see a long arrow embedded in the bird's side. Rescue attempts were unsuccessful until four volunteers from Kayak Adventures Worldwide were dispatched.

Paddlers herded the swan over a mile towards SeaLife Center staff, who strung corralling nets across a slough. The bird picked up on the net, however, so the kayakers cornered it against a bank where ASLC aviculturist Tasha DiMarzio was able to grab it.



"It was a target arrow -- blunt-tipped, not barbed," said stranding coordinator Tim Lebling, stranding coordinator at the Sealife Center. "So we pulled it out in the field."

The bird was then taken to the SeaLife Center, where staff gave it blood tests and x-rays. The arrow, which pierced nine to ten centimeters into the swan's body, narrowly missed the bird's spine and vital organs.

The swan's mate remained at Tern Lake, and because the injured bird was in otherwise excellent health, staff decided to release it that same afternoon. The swan paddled gracefully across Tern Lake to its mate, who waited and then paddled along beside it.



Release photos by Chip Arnold



Unfortunately, that’s not how the story ends. On Friday October 30, we learned that other swans had left the rapidly freezing lake to continue their migration south, but our patient was still there, presumably unable to fly. After volunteers assisted with the second capture, ASLC staff brought the trumpeter swan back to the Center, where Dr. Pam Tuomi examined her again. Although the swan—now named “Marshmallow”—showed no sign of infection and her wounds had healed beautifully, it appeared that her wing muscles had stiffened and atrophied due to lack of use.

And there may be a silver lining after all: Marshmallow has been offered a new home at a waterfowl farm in Everett, Washington, where populations of both wild and captive trumpeter swans occupy a large lake. She will be able to feed naturally year round on the ice-free lake, and may exercise her wing enough to regain the ability to fly. Even if that proves impossible, Marshmallow has a good chance of finding a new mate and living well for many years to come.

