



Pelican Harbor

SEABIRD STATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Abused Turtle Released after Rehabilitation at Pelican Harbor Seabird Station

On March 16th, 2023, Pelican Harbor Seabird Station (PHSS) received a call from a kayaker who had come across an alarming discovery: two turtles had been chained together and were stuck hanging in a Mangrove tree. The turtles were transported to the non-profit wildlife center, which identified them as a Peninsula Cooter and a Florida Red-bellied Cooter.

The turtles both had holes drilled into the edge of their carapace (upper shell) and illegible writing on their plastron (underside of the shell). Both of the freshwater turtles also displayed issues with buoyancy, an indicator of respiratory complications due to being in saltwater.

Upon admission, the turtles were unchained, given subcutaneous fluids, and placed in an oxygen chamber to decompress. Sadly, the Florida Red-Bellied Cooter's injuries were too severe, and it passed away shortly after intake. The Peninsula Cooter was able to pull through and, after one month in care, was successfully released back into the wild.

"It's sad and frustrating to see this situation come through our doors again, but I am glad to have helped this turtle to a point where it can return to the wild where it belongs." - Yaritza Acosta, Wildlife Rehabilitation Manager

Shockingly, this is not the first time that PHSS has seen a case like this. In 2019, the wildlife center admitted a separate set of turtles who had also been chained together in a suspected religious ritual. Attached to the chain was a bag wrapped in ribbon and packed with cinnamon sticks, two red voodoo dolls, and two photos of a couple. Both of the turtles suffered from severe shell rot as well as respiratory infections. One of the turtles, a Peninsula Cooter, was successfully rehabilitated and released back into the wild. Sadly, its counterpart did not survive the ordeal.

"It's unimaginable that human beings can commit such an act, but I'm just glad that places like Pelican Harbor exist to provide these abused animals with the compassion and care they deserve," said Hannah McDougall, Director of Communications.

Pelican Harbor Seabird Station is a 501(c)(3) non-profit and relies on the generosity of the public to fund its lifesaving work. For more information, visit pelicanharbor.org.