

From the Nature Center

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Webmaster

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Hooked Cormorant Caught and Released

Over the course of several days, visitors to Evergreen Lake and the Nature Center reported seeing a Double-crested Cormorant in trouble. On July 12th, while volunteer Susan Toussaint and I were getting ready to open, two Evergreen Park and Recreation (EPRD) employees knocked on the door and asked to borrow a couple of nets. They had spotted it in an accessible place and decided to take action and attempt to catch it. We loaned them the nets and went about opening the Nature Center without thinking any more about it.

To our surprise, a little later they returned with a very upset, seriously injured, and remarkably feisty Cormorant! While the young men were glad that they had captured the bird, it was in great distress and they had no clue how to help it or what to do next: the poor bird had two ginormous hooks in it – hooks far too large to ever be appropriate on Evergreen Lake. One hook was caught in its throat and the other hook went through the bird's lower beak and its tongue and was caught in its upper beak. When I leaned in for a closer look at the creature's injuries, it lunged at me, biting my finger multiple times. Though it hurt, this was a great sign that our new friend was a fighter! Susan and I ransacked the Nature Center for scissors and pliers and any other tools that might be helpful, and another EPRD employee arrived with a few more tools.

We all worked together, offering and trying out various strategies to get the hook out of the bird's mouth without causing even more damage. We attempted to cut the barb off of the hook, so we could pull it through the bird's tongue, but the hook was just too big! At one point, the guys held the cormorant's beak open with pliers while I held his tongue with one hand, and started pulling the hook through with my other hand. Eventually, one of the guys was FINALLY able to cut the barb off of the hook so that we could pull the hook through and out of the bird's mouth! When released back into the lake, the bird rinsed its mouth a few times and swam away without so much as a backward glance or a thank you. Susan and I saw him later – we could tell it was him because his tongue injury was visible – and he seemed to be doing well!



Cormorant snagged by fishing lure (c) Susan Toussaint

While this story has a happy ending, it is an important reminder to those spending time in nature that we practice respectful recreation and keep our forests and waterways safe for our wildlife residents. This is an important message that Evergreen Nature Center shares with our visitors and we encourage Evergreen Audubon members and volunteers to share it as well.

Finally, I'd like to offer a special shout out to EPRD's Lake House employees Dominic, Jake, and Ben, their supervisor, Stacy Lohr, and ENC volunteer Susan Toussaint, for their roles in this successful Comorant rescue.

Editor's note: We have a fantastic team this year between Dina Baker, ENC Director, and Heather Schwartz, our part-time Environmental Educator. Although we are not set up for wildlife rescue, in this instance Heather's training as a vet tech and her compassion for animals came in very handy. If you haven't met Dina or Heather yet, stop by the Nature Center, open Wednesday through Sunday, 11:00 am to 5:00 pm, and get to know them. You will be glad you did!