

# Residents urged to fight trash that harms wildlife

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Why not cut off the fishing line that's tangled itself somewhere underwater? Why pick up the garbage that someone else left on the side of the road?

Who is hurt by an empty soda can floating in the water?

All of us are, according to Maya Totman of Exotic and Wild Bird Rescue on Big Pine Key.

"We need to work together to help protect whatever is left of our environment and our wildlife," Totman said.

One aim of the non-profit organization to which Totman belongs is to save animals that are too-often found trapped in litter and fishing lines.

On Tuesday, Sept. 26, Tot-

man was on her way home when she saw a live bird hanging from tangled fishing line off Craig Key Bridge. Along with Liz Riesz of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in the Upper Keys and Monroe County Sheriff's Dep. Ray Jabowloski of the Islamorada marine unit, she went by boat to free the bird, but did not arrive in time to save it.

Totman said that she has many sad and difficult moments. But when she can save an animal, it makes it all worthwhile.

She said the animals most affected by discarded fishing line and trash are birds, turtles, Key deer and manatees.

On the afternoon of Monday, Oct. 2, she received a call alerting her to an injured manatee in the Tropical Bay area in Big Pine Key. Upon arriving at the scene, she said she had to enter the water and cautiously approach the large animal without scaring it off. She said she carefully removed the fish-

ing line and lure from the manatee's back to prevent an infection.

Totman said that it's not easy to rescue and rehabilitate injured animals. She has crawled through mangroves, been chased by alligators, climbed trees, crawled through bushes and run into poison-wood. But, she said, it's worth the trouble for the survival of wildlife in the Keys.

Debra Stucki, trail manager of the Florida Keys Overseas Heritage Trail, said that her agency removes about 100 tons of trash every year from the 23 historical bridgeheads that they monitor.

"Local citizens need to demand more public awareness [from] visitors spending time in the Keys," she said. "Most of this havoc is caused by weekend visitors that want to fish off the side of the road or bridge and may not be cognizant of the impact they have on wildlife."

Both Totman and Stucki encourage Keys citizens to get



Maya Totman removes a fishing lure from a manatee in the Lower Keys Sept. 26. (Contributed photo)

involved in conservation. They urge locals to help by getting the word out about the damage caused by litter, and to pick up any garbage they find.

There will be a Scenic Highway meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 10 at 4:30 p.m. at the Garden Club in Marathon, which will touch on issues related to the condition of the waters sur-

rounding the highway and the heritage trail.

Florida Keys Scenic Highway Coordinator, Charlene Wylie, said it "is an excellent way for citizens to get involved."

Information about Keys conservation is available at [www.floridaconservation.org](http://www.floridaconservation.org) or [www.fkwbc.org](http://www.fkwbc.org).