



## Top stories from around Nassau County

Sponsored by **HERALD** Community Newspapers

August 3, 2011

SHARE



Dr. John Charos of Central Veterinary Associates with the blue heron that was saved.

### NEWS

## Teaming up to save an animal's life

By Julie Mansmann

When Arlene Zuckerman headed back toward the Long Island Rail Road station after visiting her parents in Valley Stream on July 17, she did not expect to see a bird measuring three-and-a-half feet in length come crashing to the pavement.

“I checked it out and found that the bird had crawled under a car,” she said. “It was bleeding badly.”

The Audubon Society member said she wasn't scared to handle the rescue of the blue heron, a bird she would later carry in spite of its bone being exposed. Instead, she was surprised at how long it took her to find help for the creature, as the police did not arrive at the scene until she called 911 for the

third time.

Zuckerman said she hopes the public will show more care for injured wildlife, and local law enforcement and medical officials added that awareness needs to be spread about animal rescue procedures in the area.

Officer Chris Boccio, a six-year veteran at the Nassau County Police Department's 5th Precinct, said Zuckerman did the right thing when she called 911 upon finding the heron. However, Zuckerman said she was dismayed at the initial responses she received from operators before Boccio was sent, which included being put on hold long enough to be disconnected.

"Luckily, I got a hold of a passionate, patient police officer, but it is hard to get someone to help," she said. "This bird would have died terribly. There's quite a lot of wildlife in Valley Stream, and we need people to be more compassionate."

Boccio responded to Zuckerman's third call and took the bird to Central Veterinary Associates in Valley Stream, where Dr. Ernest Vine and Dr. Leah Ottenbreit performed surgery on the heron with the advisement of Dr. John Charos, director of avian and exotics medicine. Charos said the bird sustained two broken bones and a compound fracture. Though pins were used to try to "save the wing," Charos said it needed to be amputated last weekend. While he said he has responded to several animal rescue calls in the past that included retrieving a kitten from the inside of a car engine, Boccio said he has never seen a bird like the heron in Valley Stream before. The officer said police urge residents to remember when they come across a creature, it is crucial that they consider their own well being and not get too close to a hurting, irritated animal. "We always want to look out for the well being of everybody," he said. "We want to make sure the animals get help, but it is also important to make the people safe because the animals can be dangerous."

With vegetation and habitat available and local parks and areas like Mill Pond, Charos said he was not surprised that this type of bird was found locally — he said he has seen a heron in the area, and suspects that the injured juvenile may be the offspring of this bird. However, Charos said doctors will not be re-releasing the bird into the wild since the infected wing was amputated. "He's been feeling better since the surgery, and is much more active," he said. "He will be moved to a permanent rehabilitation center in about a week."

According to Charos, Valley Stream wildlife includes different types of ducks, swans, raccoons, turtles, possums and foxes, all of which he said are at greater risk for injury in the warm summer months when people are moving around in their cars and temperatures can exceed deadly levels.

Central Veterinary Associates does not send cars or rescue personnel to the scene of an accident, but they will care for injured animals for free as a "service to the community," Charos said. The doctor said it is important that Long Islanders note that the Animal Care and Control hotline will only respond to calls from the New York City area. While Nassau County Wildlife Control also has a hotline, Charos said locals should call law enforcement officials if they find a hurt animal so it can be brought to Central Veterinary Associates, which is open 24 hours a day. While doctors said the heron is doing better and regaining its appetite, Zuckerman said the bird may not have been so lucky if it weren't for them and Boccio. The officer agreed, saying there are others like Zuckerman who seem to generally care for injured animals they find in the roadways and elsewhere. "In this situation, she seemed very well versed in what to do," Boccio said. "It would help if more people were aware. As a whole, the population needs to know who to call if they come across any injured animal."