

Marathon op saves Mahli after heartless hit-run



On wing and a prayer

ADAM TODD

A PELICAN struck by a car in a heartless hit-run in the western suburbs yesterday has survived a delicate three-hour operation to repair a broken wing.

But the six-month-old female bird faces an uncertain few days and could still be euthanised if she flaps her wings too much and undoes the vet's work.

The pelican was wandering down the side of Hanson Rd, Mansfield Park, about 8.10am, when it was hit by the north-bound car, which continued without helping the bird.

The pelican has been named Mahli, after a young girl who witnessed the accident with her dad and offered comfort until help arrived.

Australian Marine Wildlife Research and Rescue Organisation head Aaron Machado said the surgery, which involved inserting a 20cm stainless steel pin into her broken wing bone, went as well as could be expected.

"We'll need to wait a few days before we can consider her stable – we need to make sure the bone is healing well," he said. "If she thrashes too much and undoes the work of the vets by moving that pin, then we've got a big problem.

"We need to manage her pain pretty extensively over the next few days and we'll see how she recovers."

A witness said the car, a dark-coloured sedan, kept going, leaving the pelican – a protected species – lying limp by the side of the road. "Who-



PROTECTED SPECIES: Aaron Machado tends to injured Mahli at the scene, before taking her for surgery yesterday. **Picture:** Brooke Whatnall

 **Updates on the pelican patient**
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ever hit it, knew that they hit this bird – there's no way they could have not known," the witness said.

"To drive on is just pathetic; to leave it there struggling is a gutless thing to do."

Mr Machado was called to the scene and rushed the bird

to the Adelaide Zoo for surgery. He said the morning's wild weather was the likely reason the pelican was so far from its natural habitat. He said the driver must have known they had hit the bird.

"They stand about 1m tall, so it's like hitting a little child," he said. "I'm having a hard time figuring out how you wouldn't stop – it's inconsiderate, inhumane and shows no compassion."

If the bird survives, she faces

at least six weeks of physiotherapy to ensure her muscles do not weaken while the pin is in her wing.

"We've got to make sure we get her out as a wild bird as soon as possible – do lots of light stretches, make sure the muscles are still in use," Mr Machado said.

Mahli was later taken to the Australian Marine Wildlife Research and Rescue Organisation's base on Torrens Island.