Florida biologist saves drowning bear

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30 Jun 2008

Biologist Adam Warwick saves a 375-pound black bear from drowning in Gulf waters

The 375lb beast had been roaming a residential area at Alligator Point, near Tallahassee, when wildlife officers decided to trap it and move it away from houses.

They shot the bear with a tranquiliser dart, spooking the animal, which raced toward the water. With the tranquilising dart taking longer than expected to have an effect on the animal, it managed to swim at least 25 yards before becoming drowsy.

That was when Adam Warwick, a biologist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, decided the bear may need rescuing and dived in.

"I wasn't sure what I was going to do when I jumped in," he said "It was a spur of the moment decision. I had a lot of adrenaline pumping when I saw the bear in the water.

"I wanted to keep him from swimming into deeper water."

As the animal started losing the ability to move its legs, it became distressed and Mr Warwick decided to try to create a splash to herd the animal back to shore.

"Instead, the clearly confused bear looked at me as if he was either going to go by, through or over me ... and at times he even looked as if he was just going to climb on top of me to keep from drowning."

Mr Warwick said the bear reared up on his hind legs as if to lunge at him, but, incapacitated by the tranquiliser, fell straight backwards and began to sink.

"At that point I knew I had to keep the bear from drowning," he said. "After a few seconds the bear popped his head up out of the water and thrashed around a bit, but could obviously no longer keep his head above water."

Mr Warwick kept one arm underneath the bear gripped the scruff of the bear's neck with the other to keep its head above water as he dragged the animal back to shore.

He suffered only a cut foot from barnacles and a single scratch from the bear.

"It's a lot easier to drag a bear in four-foot water than move him on dry land," he said.

The animal was loaded into a tractor bucket and taken to a wildlife officer's lorry and released in Osceola National Forest, near Lake City.

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