

Ducklings rescued from sewer in Lewiston

SJ sunjournal.com/2012/06/23/ducklings-rescued-sewer-lewiston

June 23, 2012

LEWISTON — Morning in the city sewer system?

Just another day in the life of animal rescuer Richard Burton, who climbed down into the sewer beneath Randall Road on Friday to scoop out seven ducklings that had fallen through a grate.

It wasn't easy. The tiny ducks kept swimming off into the dark. A net broke and there was a log to be tripped over.

Then there was the fact that it was a sewer, which just complicates everything.

"It didn't smell so great down there," Burton said.

It happened Friday morning when a mother duck went waddling across a sewer grate, presumably to get to the other side. Her ducklings tried to follow, but they didn't have the same girth as their mom.

"They're smaller than the slots on the grate," Burton said. "One by one, they just dropped down into the sewer."

Animal Control Officer Wendell Strout went to the scene and tried to retrieve the ducklings with a net. Big problem: His net did not reach down far enough to get the job done.

Strout called Burton, who has a collapsible net that will reach just about anywhere. Burton, famed for rescuing cats, raccoons, skunks, bats, seagulls and other critters from seemingly intractable predicaments, went to Randall Road.

It looked like it was going to be an easy job.

"I got four of the little ducks into the net," he said. "And then it broke."

The ducklings went plop again. Now, there were several would-be rescuers up on dry land, but no practical way to scoop the ducks out.

Except maybe for the ladder.

"I said, 'I guess I have to go down in there,'" Burton said.

And down he went.

“I looked and there they were, a bunch of ducks swimming around in the sewage,” he said. “I started scooping them up with the net, but I didn’t get all of them. I could hear one duckling calling from far off.”

That duckling had paddled off through the muck and into the dark. Above ground, Strout and some city officials who had come by to help began trying to figure out exactly where the duck had gone.

Burton climbed back up the ladder with the grimy ducks he had scooped from below. They followed the sound of the crying duck and narrowed down its location.

“Sure enough, it popped up in a pipe,” Burton said.

The only thing left to do was capture the mother duck and take them all to a more suitable location.

No such luck. Momma duck didn’t want to go. Attempts to grab her were futile, although Burton got close.

“I reached for her, but she started to fly off,” Burton said. “I tripped over a log and down I went.”

The mother duck evaded rescue, but Burton had the babies. He took them away, cleaned them up and took them to the home of Jen Lewis of Misfits Rehab in Auburn. Lewis will care for the ducklings until it’s time to set them free.

As for Burton, it was shower time before he was called off to another rescue in another part of the state.

He regrets nothing.

“I wasn’t about to let those ducks drown down there in the sewage,” he said. “No way.”

mlaflamme@sunjournal.com

Ducklings shown after they were cleaned up by animal rescuer Rich Burton, who plucked the animals from a sewer in Lewiston Friday morning.