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Keystone Ocean Species in Crisis from Unknown Cause in Southern California

180 emaciated brown pelicans rescued since May 14

(Friday, May 20, 2022) Santa Barbara, CA – On Saturday, May 14, an unusual influx of [emaciated, weak, and hypothermic brown pelicans](#), a type of seabird, began arriving at the Wildlife Hospital at the Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network (SBWCN). 180 brown pelicans have since been rescued and delivered to SBWCN at a daily accelerating rate. While the birds are being examined and receiving care, the exact cause of their condition is still being investigated at this time. The unknown cause is unusual and alarming, with multiple groups along the Southern California coast working to identify the reason for this dramatic decline of this charismatic species.

These pelicans have been rescued from all over Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties. Most of them are lethargic, unable to fly or move, or are found in an unusual location. SBWCN's team of rescuers and volunteers have been retrieving and transporting as many patients as possible to their rehabilitation facility in Goleta. Reports of many more sick and deceased pelicans continue to come in.

All new patients receive a full intake exam upon arriving at SBWCN. Most of these pelicans are found to be emaciated and a few have additional injuries. The SBWCN team is treating these birds by providing fluids, food, medication, warmth, and supportive care. The team is working with other nearby wildlife centers to transport some of these birds and assist in their rehabilitation.

Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network's brand new Wildlife Hospital is providing critical space and resources to assist in this emergency. The doors to this building opened in February of 2022 and features 5,400 square feet of state-of-the-art facilities. The Seabird Bay, a room dedicated to housing seabirds, normally only holds a handful of patients at a time. Currently, this room is converted into a large pen in order to accommodate all of the pelicans in care. This situation is also occurring in the middle of

spring baby season, where SBWCN receives hundreds of orphaned baby birds and mammals in need of care. Currently, there are more than 300 total patients in care.

“I’m so proud of our staff, volunteers, and the entire community for jumping into action to help these pelicans,” said Ariana Katovich, Executive Director of SBWCN. “While we’re still unsure what’s causing this emergency situation, we are continuing to take in these birds and help them in any way we can.”

The public can support SBWCN during this time by making a donation to support the purchase of medications, fluids, food, and additional supplies. Donations can be made online: www.sbwcn.org/donate

To report a sick or injured pelican in Santa Barbara or Ventura County, citizens should call the SBWCN Helpline: (805) 681-1080

Updates on the unfolding situation can be found at <https://www.sbwcn.org/pelicans>.

About Brown Pelicans

Brown pelicans are large seabirds that range anywhere from 8–10 pounds with a wingspan between 6.5–7.5 feet. They are common residents of the southern coasts of the United States, with ranges extending down to South America. They are known for plunge-diving into the ocean to catch their food – one of only two pelican species to do so. These social birds can be found congregating in large flocks almost year round. Populations reached dangerously low numbers in the 1960s due to pollution from the pesticide DDT, and the species was listed as endangered by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1972. Thanks to DDT regulations and conservation recovery efforts, the brown pelican has since been removed from the endangered species list.

About Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network

Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network (SBWCN) is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1988. For over 30 years, SBWCN has served to rescue, rehabilitate, and return to the wild sick, injured, orphaned, and oil-impaired animals in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties and to educate the public about living in harmony with wildlife. SBWCN takes care of more than 4,000 patients per year, including small mammals, seabirds, songbirds, raptors, and herptiles. The SBWCN Helpline is available everyday from 9 AM–5 PM for animal emergencies and wildlife advice: (805) 681-1080. Donations in support of this work can be made at www.sbwcn.org/donate.

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