

# PLIGHT OF THE PELICANS





A staff member feeds pelicans inside the new Wildlife Hospital.

# CALIFORNIA PELICAN CRISIS

**Brown pelicans are majestic creatures.** With their impressive wingspans, expandable pouches, and acrobatic hunting techniques, these ancient seabirds are an iconic species that inhabit the California coast with their style and charisma. Despite their widespread population in Santa Barbara County, Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network (SBWCN) typically only receives about 100 brown pelicans each year. They usually arrive because of an injury, like a broken wing or ingested fishing hook, because they're oiled by the natural seepage in the area, or because they are juveniles having trouble surviving on their own. But during the month of May, **something was happening to brown pelicans that were causing an emergency crisis throughout the California coast.**

On Saturday, May 14, Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network began receiving an unusually large influx of brown pelican patients. Calls began flooding in from citizens who were discovering pelicans in odd places – on the side of the road, in backyards, swimming in freshwater pools – and were often unable to fly. **In just two weeks, more than 230 pelicans were rescued and brought to SBWCN's Wildlife Hospital to receive care.**

Every single pelican that arrived at the Wildlife Hospital received a full intake exam. The animal care team checked their weight, temperature, hydration levels, body condition, and alertness, as well as any obvious injuries and ailments. **Most of these birds were diagnosed as severely emaciated, dehydrated, and hypothermic,** and several others had additional injuries. Depending on their condition, each birds' treatment plan could include fluids (for hydration), food (including herring, smelt and sardines), warmth (to stabilize their temperature), medications (antibiotics, pain meds, etc.), and additional supportive care. With hundreds of pelicans in care at the same time, the Wendy McCaw Wildlife Hospital transformed into a critical triage zone to properly facilitate their care. The doors to this building opened in February of 2022, and it has already proven to be essential in aiding in emergency responses.

This crisis was not limited to the Santa Barbara and Ventura areas. Wildlife rehabilitation centers from Monterey County to San Diego County experienced a similar influx of emaciated pelicans. These organizations, including SBWCN, have been working alongside the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to help identify the cause of this widespread illness. After months of investigating, CDFW determined the cause of this event was starvation. While testing ruled out disease and toxins (like avian influenza and Domoic acid poisoning), **the exact reason why these pelicans were starving is inconclusive.**

Luckily, most of these pelicans responded incredibly well to treatment. SBWCN's team of staff and volunteers spent weeks dedicating their time and effort to help these patients make a full recovery. By the end of June, the majority of birds rescued had either been transferred to International Bird Rescue or were released back into the wild.



A group of rehabilitated pelicans released at Butterfly Beach in Montecito.

In order to qualify for release, the animal care team looks for a few important benchmarks, including the pelican's body condition, feather quality, and mentation. **In total, SBWCN released more than 60 brown pelicans that were ready to rejoin the wild population.**

"Seeing these pelicans get a second chance out in the wild makes all the hard work worthwhile," said Ariana Katovich, SBWCN's Executive Director. "Our team has dedicated incredible time and effort, and we couldn't have done it without the support of our community."

Thanks to the donations, volunteer time, and outpouring of support from the community, these pelicans were able to receive the immediate, expert care they needed in order to make a full recovery.



## STRENGTHEN THE SAFETY NET

During events like these, SBWCN acts as a safety net for wild animals when they need it most. These response efforts would not be possible without your generosity! **Help strengthen our safety net at [www.sbwcn.org/donate](http://www.sbwcn.org/donate).**



## BY THE NUMBERS: MAY 14-JUNE 14

**260+**

Brown pelicans rescued

**6,000+**

Pounds of fish purchased

**800+**

Hours of emergency volunteer work



Above: A volunteer transporter rescues a sick pelican. Below: Recovering pelicans residing in SBWCN's outdoor pool and aviary.



## BROWN PELICAN FAST FACTS



Brown pelicans are common residents along the southern coasts of the United States, with ranges extending down to South America.



With wingspans between 6.5–7.5 feet, brown pelicans are actually the smallest out of the seven pelican species around the world!



They are known for plunge-diving into the ocean to catch their food – one of only two pelican species to do so.



Their gular pouch can hold three times more water than their stomach!



A group of pelicans is called a squadron.



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.



1460 N FAIRVIEW AVE  
GOLETA, CA 93117



(805) 681-1080



WWW.SBWCN.ORG



CONTACT@SBWCN.ORG



77-0201505

# WHAT'S NEW AT THE WILDLIFE HOSPITAL?

## IT'S (STILL) BABY SEASON



Pelicans have been the star of the show the last few months, but it's still baby season at SBWCN! In addition to responding to the pelican crisis, the animal care team has been busy caring for hundreds of other orphaned babies – like finches, woodpeckers, wrens, ducklings, raccoons, skunks, rabbits, opossums, and so much more.

Luckily, the SBWCN team has been utilizing the rooms and resources within the new Wildlife Hospital! In case you missed it, it's not too late to watch the Virtual Open House for a behind-the-scenes tour of baby season in the new building. **Visit [www.sbwc.org/openhouse](http://www.sbwc.org/openhouse) to check it out!**

## WELCOME, DR. ALDORETTA!



SBWCN is excited to introduce our new staff veterinarian and **Director of Veterinary Services: Dr. Rebecca Aldoretta!**

Dr. Aldoretta joins the SBWCN team with vast experience in the veterinary field, including wildlife medicine, exotic pet medicine, companion animal general practice, and emergency medicine. After earning her DVM from Kansas State University in 2015, she's worked all over the United States, including Miami, Las Vegas, and Chicago. Most recently, Dr. Aldoretta completed a specialty internship program in Zoo, Exotics, and Wildlife Medicine at the Atlantic Veterinary College in Prince Edward Island, Canada. She loves hiking, reading, and spending time with her German shepherd named Maya.

**SBWCN is thrilled to have her leading the Cariño Veterinary Program!**

## AVIAN INFLUENZA



With the recent detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in California, SBWCN is implementing precautionary protocols to prevent the spread of the virus and to ensure the health of all wild animal patients. These implemented protocols include isolated exam areas, increased personal protective equipment, and quarantining high risk species (like waterfowl and shorebirds).

**SBWCN is asking the public to call the SBWCN Helpline (805-681-1080) before touching or handling any wildlife** and to stop at the designated area in front of the SBWCN facility when dropping off an animal. For more information on HPAI, visit [www.sbwc.org/hpai](http://www.sbwc.org/hpai).



# WILD NIGHT OUT

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12 | 5-9 PM | SANTA BARBARA CLUB

Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network's annual fundraising benefit returns for another year of wild fun! Join fellow wildlife-lovers for a magical evening of food, drinks, music, live auction, and plenty of fun – all benefitting SBWCN's work to rehabilitate local wildlife.



For tickets and sponsorships, visit  
[www.sbwcen.org/wildnightout2022](http://www.sbwcen.org/wildnightout2022).



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Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network  
PO Box 6594  
Santa Barbara, CA 93160