



Refugio Response Joint Information Center

Tracking Brown Pelicans Affected by Refugio Oil Spill

The UC Davis Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife – Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) are placing satellite tracking devices on 12 brown pelicans affected by the Refugio Oil Spill in Santa Barbara. The oiled pelicans were recovered and cleaned after the oil spill in May and have been rehabilitating at the Los Angeles Oiled Bird Care and Education Center in the weeks since. View photos at www.RefugioResponse.com at 1pm, June 12.

To learn more about the study and the devices being used, read below:

Why are you placing tracking devices on pelicans?

To see if they survive and return to normal behaviors after having been oiled. The birds will be tracked for about two years because we want to see if they return to breeding colonies when the time comes next year.

How do the tracking devices work?

The back of the tracking device has two antennas: one that collects GPS data to be stored on the device and one that relays that data to satellites that can be accessed through our online portal. The devices log 12 points per day during daylight hours.

What do the devices look like?

Each one weighs 65 grams (an iPhone weighs 172 grams). It has an angled front that allows pelicans to dive for fish with minimal resistance or disruption to the harness. A neoprene material serves as padding between the device and the bird.

How do you attach the devices to the pelicans?

The pelicans wear the harness like a backpack that is attached with Teflon ribbon around their body. One loop is in front of the wing and another is behind the wing. Those two loops are connected by a piece of Teflon ribbon under the bird's body.

How are the devices powered?

They have solar panels on top, so they are recharged daily by the sun.

Is this the only way pelicans will be followed?

In addition to the satellite devices, each pelican will have a permanent metal Federal band placed on one leg and a green plastic numbered leg band on the other. Once birds are at the breeding site, plastic bands will help see if they are attending nests.

Where do pelicans typically live? How far do they range?

They are near-shore foragers, so they typically don't go very far out over the water. They move along the coast when it's time to breed.

Will there be a control group of birds that were not oiled?

Yes. We will place tracking devices on 8 control birds that were not affected by the spill and tracking their movement as well.

Who is funding this study?

The Oiled Wildlife Care Network, which is based at the Karen C. Drayer Wildlife Health Center at the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, and the California

Department of Fish and Wildlife's Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR).

Has this been done before?

Yes. This is a follow-up to a study done in California after the American Trader oil spill in 1990 using more advanced technology and newer rehabilitation methods. Also, we are working with collaborators who have successfully tagged and tracked close to 100 brown pelicans after Deepwater Horizon.

Are there other collaborators?

Yes. The OWCN and OSPR are partnering with the US Geological Survey, Clemson University, Humboldt State University's Wildlife Department, US Fish & Wildlife Service and International Bird Rescue.

For more information, visit www.owcn.org or www.wildlife.ca.gov/OSPR. If a member of the public sees one of these birds with green bands on their legs, please call our hotline and let us know about it (877-UCD-OWCN; 877-823-6926).

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