

NEWS RELEASE - Dept. of Fish & Game - Aug. 7, 1971

BROWN PELICAN NESTING  
RESULTS DISCOURAGING

California's only nesting colony of brown pelicans produced seven young this year, and, although production was up sharply from last year, the future continues to look bleak for pelican nesting in the state.

The Department of Fish and Game released this report after completing surveillance of the colony on Anacapa Island off Oxnard July 27 in a cooperative effort with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service.

This year's production was from a total of 600 nesting attempts, which compares with one young produced from 552 nesting attempts in 1970.

The 1971 study was less intensive than that conducted last year when Franklin Gress of the University of California spent a total of 32 days on Anacapa in the Channel Island National Monument documenting the reproductive plight of the brown pelican.

The Park Service closed West Anacapa Island to public access, and only six trips were made this year to observe the nesting colony and to record pelican nesting.

With the exception of a trip July 27, observations of the colony by Gress and DFG biologists were made from a boat offshore from where observers could see the birds without disturbing them.

When first observed on March 24, the colony had just been established, and pelicans were going about the business of nest-building and breeding behavior. Expansion of the nesting area, abandonment of nests and renesting attempts were seen on subsequent trips.

The observation team surveyed the nesting site, on a precipitous slope above the ocean's edge, from above after landing on the island July 27. Of 600 nests observed, 18 were occupied and seven young were

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counted. A colony of this size normally would produce 800 to 1,000 pelicans.

That no young were found in the 48 cormorant nests located in the pelican colony indicated that they had experienced reproductive failure.

Howard Leach, special wildlife coordinator with the DFG, commented that again this year there was "conclusive evidence" that the birds were laying thin-shelled eggs "incapable of being incubated."

"Broken and paper-thin eggshells littered the colony," Leach said. He added that such reproductive failure has been attributed to DDT and its metabolites.

Despite the doubtfulness of pelican reproduction in California, officials noted, the picture is not entirely bleak.

Studies conducted this year by Dr. Dan W. Anderson of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Mexico indicate that there was a much more substantial production of young in the Gulf of California.

Anderson banded and color-marked some 3,000 young in hopes of receiving reports of their movements.

Some of these birds are now appearing along the California coastline and will spend late summer and fall where they can be seen by sightseers.

Hopefully, sightings of color-marked birds will be reported to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the Department of Fish and Game to aid in the study.

Plans for next year are to continue the surveillance of Anacapa Island pelicans and the study of pelicans in Mexico.

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