

PRESS RELEASE

August 1997

GRASS ROOTS CHARITY GIVES LIFE TO SAVE ENDANGERED BIRDS

Pacific Wildlife Project is a small independent non profit (501[c](3) charity dedicated to helping wildlife in distress. Founded in 1986, the grass roots organization has gained a reputation for providing medical care to injured wildlife. The group survives on donations from citizens and is all volunteer staff. Last year, the Project was contacted by USFWS to care for endangered brown pelicans stricken with botulism at the Salton Sea in southern California. Because Pacific Wildlife Project specializes in the care of seabirds and particularly pelicans, the agency called on their expertise when the crisis occurred. The Project succeeded beyond anyone's expectations in the numbers of birds saved and returned to the wild. Unfortunately, this success was Pacific Wildlife Projects "swan song". The expense of the pelican rescue financially devastated the tiny charity. Expecting that USFWS would reimburse the Project for out of pocket expenses like fish, medical supplies and rescue cost, the Project sent an invoice to USFWS to be reimbursed. In a July 30th meeting the agency rejected the charity's plea for financial relief, contending that they do not have the funds in their budget allotment. At the meeting, Pacific Wildlife was asked how many more birds can be treated at their center without compensation from the federal government. Officials indicated that there are no other treatment centers take the sick birds. During the crisis, the federal agency solicited and received donations from private donors. The funds were used to improve the rescue facilities at the federal refuge, but no funds were budgeted for medical treatment of the birds. At this writing, the Pacific Wildlife Project is closed and cannot treat the expected influx of pelicans from the impending recurrence of botulism at Salton Sea.

Congressman Sonny Bono heads a congressional task force overseeing the devastation at Salton Sea and is working with other representatives Packard, George Brown, Lewis, and Hunter to identify solutions to resolve the deterioration of the ecosystem of California's largest lake. The health and maintenance of the resident population of wildlife is said to be included in the task forces goals. Pacific Wildlife Project is asking the support of other organizations and lobby groups to help us help these, suffering birds. Members of the public can help by help by contacting these task force members and members of congressional environmental committees and ask for funding approval to help the birds at Salton Sea.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

As of August 1st, the botulism outbreak has already started again at Salton Sea. Without help, thousands more will die.

The crisis began last year. From August to November 1996, the nation suffered its largest die-off of endangered birds in history. Thousands of California Brown pelicans were felled by deadly botulism toxin. At Salton Sea, more than 14,000 birds of 66 species died. An Orange County organization, the Pacific Wildlife Project, came to the rescue of the dying birds. They rallied volunteers to make daily 400 mile trips to pick up the dying pelicans and transport them to the Project's wildlife treatment facility. 8500 white pelicans and 1100 Brown pelicans were found dead at the sea. Over 1100 were

rescued by PWP. Some volunteers worked 16-20 hours each day treating sick and dying pelicans paralyzed by the botulism toxin. Over 800 endangered Brown pelicans were returned to the wild. This number represented nearly 5% of the world's California Brown pelican breeding population. The success was unprecedented. In all, 34,000 miles were driven by volunteers; 40,000 lbs. of fish were fed; 100 volunteers were recruited and trained. Not a single bird was lost through lack of care. All of this was accomplished on an emergency basis, with no prior preparation or notice. PWP was successful in rallying the community to work together for the common environmental goal of saving our precious resource, the endangered Brown pelican.

The cost to the publicly supported charity was staggering. Donations of supplies and money kept the costs low, but was not enough to pay all the expenses. Pacific Wildlife Project has been forced to close its doors as a direct result of the financial impact of their heroic rescue efforts. They have requested reimbursement from the US Fish & Wildlife Service of \$85,000 to no avail. Without financial aid, Pacific Wildlife Project will face permanent closure. Letters of support and donations would be a great help in keeping this important group alive. Send inquiries for more information to; Pacific Wildlife Project; PO Box 7673; Laguna Niguel CA 92607