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Pelicans Suffer Accidents and Abuse in California

The fishing was terrible last summer along southern California's coast, with tragic results for migrating brown pelicans. Desperate for food, the endangered birds became even bolder than usual, haunting harbors, competing with fishermen and tangling in their lines.

South of Los Angeles in Laguna Niguel, about 700 of the pelicans were treated by a wildlife hospital called the Pacific Wildlife Project. Its director, Linda Evans, and her husband, Richard, a veterinarian, remove sutures after surgery to excise a fishhook (right) -the most common problem but by no means the most serious.

"We have received about 50 pelicans that were deliberately killed or mutilated," Linda reports. "Nine birds were strangled, and more than ten others had half of their upper bills cut off with a sharp instrument. All died." Last August one man was convicted in state court of clubbing a pelican to death and sentenced to ten days of community service and a year's probation; federal penalties would have been far more severe. The Evanses are circulating posters seeking tips about such ghastly incidents, information that could bring a \$3,000 reward.