

The Pelican Grief

West coast birds are desperate for food. Some are getting more than a mouthful.

By Staff Writer

Unusually warm ocean currents along southern California's coast have scattered fish from their normal areas. That has created near-starvation conditions for the California brown pelican. As a result, the endangered birds are diving closer to shore, where fishing lines pose a danger. Linda Evans directs Pacific Wildlife Project, an animal hospital south of Los Angeles. Evans says since last summer her hospital has treated scores of injured pelicans.

"Most of the injuries we presume were accidents because they were bits of fishing line wrapped around wings and legs or hooks imbedded in various parts of the body."

But Evans says not all the wounds are accidental. She says many pelicans are victims of brutality.

"Some birds were beaten with poles or some other instrument, usually in front of a witness, and one bird we received last year was even burned and occasionally we'll find one that was shot."

Others have had their beaks chopped off. Evans says people are attacking the pelicans because they wrongly believe they're competing for the limited fish supply. But she says the birds eat fish that are of little value to people. If the warm ocean currents persist, says Evans, problems will continue. She says the endangered birds face an uncertain future.

"There will continue to be more interactions with humans, and that's always a danger to anything that lives in the wild. And then with some tropical storms hitting in the colonies and pollution near their nesting colonies those factors could all be very detrimental to the population."

Earthwatch Radio
Script for Wednesday, September 01, 1993

