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SALTON SEA IN CRISIS AGAIN AS BOTULISM OUTBREAK CONTINUES

THE HEAT GOES ON -- The SONNY BONO SALTON SEA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE (has the most diverse bird population of any national wildlife refuge appears one step closer to death)

WHAT: OVER 200, SICK, ENDANGERED BROWN PELICANS ARE NOW AT PACIFIC WILDLIFE PROJECT, the non-profit expert sea bird rehabilitation facility. PWP(led by world renown sea-bird specialist, DVM Richard Evans and directed by Linda Evans) for the fourth year in a row, is again a primary partner in assisting the US Fish & Wildlife Service in rescue and direction of the rehabilitation effort.

The Salton Sea botulism outbreaks have caused the largest known die-offs of the endangered brown pelican. In '96, 20% of the west coast species of brown pelicans died in the botulism outbreak. '96 an estimated 20,000 birds perished overall that year. The botulism outbreak is the largest in the country.

USF&W personnel are rescuing and transporting a truckload of 17-20 birds daily to PWP. Upon arrival at PWP, the sick birds receive immediate and then 'round the clock, intensive aid in order to purge the botulism from their system. PWP-all volunteer effort is extremely time consuming, constant and grueling, lasting months. However, success rate is high as a result.

VOLUNTEER HELP IS DESPERATELY NEEDED to cope with the enormous numbers of birds that need help. THE MORE HELP at PWP, THE MORE BIRDS that can be helped at PWP which in turn means even the sicker browns and also the white pelicans can have a chance of survival in this awful outbreak. PWP needs the added help to be able to ask USF&W to bring in more birds. PWP financial sponsors for this outbreak are targeting sicker (what PWP calls pancakes) brown pelicans and as many white pelicans as can be accommodated too. So far, no white pelicans have been transported.

Over 50 species of other seabirds are involved in the die-off including: American white pelican, loons, grebes, cormorants, herons, ducks, osprey, egrets, gulls, sandpipers and plovers. In '97 over 6,000 birds died, from consuming dead and dying fish containing botulism. August '98 - a record - 500,000 fish die-off in one day. August 1999 - 7.6 million die in one day. Dead fish, within which the botulism toxins flourish, is then eaten by birds that will die unless rescued. Many birds die from drowning as they are

unable to lift their heads above the water because the botulism toxin paralyzes them. Birds become unable to even blink; eye damage occurs.

PACIFIC WILDLIFE PROJECT has for, the past four years, been able to rehabilitate the pelicans affected by the deadly and paralytic botulism, releasing them back into the wild, along the coast, in unprecedented numbers.

WHERE: PACIFIC WILDLIFE PROJECT IS receiving birds at the Irvine Animal Shelter. (Sand Canyon exit off either the 405 or the 5 freeway, it's between the two freeways; facility is visible from Sand Canyon but take a quick north on Oak Canyon and turn east into the facility. PWP is the last south wing, closest to Sand Canyon Blvd.) Irvine Animal Shelter - 949-724-7740

WHEN: today & foreseeable future - between 12:00 - 1:00 receiving next USF&W truckload. Salton Sea - California's largest lake, 242,000 acres, located about 160 miles southeast of Los Angeles. Donations of medical supplies and food substances and financial aid are coming in from across the US. However, PWP has an enormous financial crunch to pay for supplies needed.

[Donations may be sent to the Pacific Wildlife Project, c/o Linda Evans, 25061 Adelanto Dr., Laguna Niguel, CA 92677.]