

Sick pelicans mysteriously showing up in Southern California

May 10 2018



-In this April 28, 2018, file photo, made from video provided by Pepperdine University, shows one of a pair of pelicans crashing a graduation ceremony at Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif. The wildlife organization, International Bird Rescue, said Thursday, May 10, 2018, that there's been a surge in the number of sick and dying brown pelicans along the Southern California coast in the past week. (Grant Dillion/Pepperdine University via AP, file)

The number of sick and dying brown pelicans has surged for unknown reasons along the Southern California coast in the past week, a wildlife

organization said Thursday.

More than 25 pelicans have been brought to a wildlife rehabilitation center in the San Pedro district of Los Angeles, International Bird Rescue said.

The big birds are showing signs of emaciation, hypothermia and anemia, the organization said.

It's normal to receive recently fledged baby pelicans this time of year but the current wave includes many second-year birds, said Kylie Clatterbuck, the center's manager.

The organization said there have been many cases of pelicans landing on city streets, residential yards and airport runways. A well-publicized incident occurred April 28 when two pelicans landed at Pepperdine University's graduation ceremony in Malibu.

"They just don't want to fly," said Russ Curtis, a spokesman for the organization in San Francisco.

The group has not yet sent any pelicans to labs for necropsies because it has been inundated with the task of taking care of the arriving birds, he said.

There have been past incidents of California brown pelicans being sickened by domoic acid, a toxin produced at times by algae. It enters the food chain when fish eat the algae.



-In this June 24, 2008, file photo, a Brown Pelican takes flight at Gualala Point Park in Gualala, Calif. The wildlife organization, International Bird Rescue, said Thursday, May 10, 2018, that there's been a surge in the number of sick and dying brown pelicans along the Southern California coast in the past week.(AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, file)

Curtis said, however, that the famished birds don't show the neurological problems typical of domoic acid outbreaks such as spasms or inability to hold their heads up.

"It's still a mystery," he said.

Pelicans are normally seen flying in formations, sometimes gliding just above the ocean surface. To feed, they circle high above the water to spot prey and then dramatically dive to catch fish with their long bills.

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