

# Dead birds continue washing in

## Unknown illness hits local seabirds

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SANTA CRUZ — Dead and dying cormorants and pelicans continue to wash up along Santa Cruz beaches, and animal welfare workers are still trying to identify the ailment that is killing them.

By Monday afternoon, about 100 birds had been brought in since Friday, said Patricia Wilson of Native Animal Rescue.

Wilson said that the short-staffed Native Animal Rescue office and the SPCA have been run ragged with phone calls from people reporting sick and dead birds. She said that it would be extremely helpful if people who find the birds would bring them to Native Animal Rescue at 2200 Seventh Ave.

She suggests throwing a towel over a weakened bird, scooping it up and then bringing it in.

Wilson said that as soon as the sick birds are brought in they are put on fluids, antibiotics and vitamins.

"It's hard to say if the medicine is helping," she said. "We can treat six birds brought in at the same time and some will live and some will die. It all depends on how close to death they were when they were found."

Most of the birds are being found between Natural Bridges and Schwann Lake.

Both the Fish and Game Wildlife Investigations Lab in Rancho Cordova and the Fish and Game Wildlife Lab in Michigan are working on blood samples from sick birds and are doing tests from the dead ones, said Wilson.

She said a similar problem occurred with sick and dying birds about this time last year. In a sudden, unexplained outbreak that lasted about two weeks, 20 to 30 pelicans and cormorants died.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Animal-rescue volunteer Patti Turner holds dead cormorant.

"These symptoms are very similar. We sent the bodies to the lab last year and they were unable to determine the problem," she said. "Hopefully they will be able to define the problem this time."

Native Animal Rescue is looking for volunteers to patrol the beaches for the birds and take them to the organization's headquarters. They also need vol-

unteers to help treat sick birds.

"We're spending a lot of money on antibiotics, so any donations would also be appreciated," she said.

To report sick or dead birds, call 462-0726 or 475-6454. After 6 p.m., call 662-1085. If there is no answer, leave a message telling where the bird was spotted.