

VCF BIRDS

# Young pelicans 'starving to death'

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Food has become scarce, wildlife-rescue officials say

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Blaming El Niño for changing fish-migration patterns in Monterey Bay, wildlife-rescue officials say young brown pelicans in the region are starving to death.

"We've lost two juvenile pelicans, and we have eight of them here now," said Lori Moak-Kean,

a director of the Native Animal Rescue Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Santa Cruz on Wednesday. "And we expect to have more, a lot more, brought in."

"These pelicans are emaciated. They're starving to death."

Moak-Kean said starving young pelicans have been found up and down the coast, including Pajaro

Dunes, Moss Landing, Pescadero and the Santa Cruz wharf.

El Niño, the weather phenomenon that changes ocean habitat by increasing water temperatures in the sea off the California coast, has kept fish normally eaten by young pelicans scarce in Monterey Bay, Moak-Kean said. She said that juvenile brown pelicans generally eat anchovies and smelt, as well as any other smaller varieties of fish that swim in the bay.

Now the young pelicans are competing with adults for a

smaller amount of food, she said.

Native Animal Rescue officials said they "anticipate many more young pelicans arriving within the next few weeks" at their rehabilitation center.

Volunteers are tube-feeding the young birds with a nutritional supplement, trying to get them strong enough to eat on their own. When they are able, said Moak-Kean, the pelicans will be allowed to scoop small smelt out of a bowl to gain nourishment.

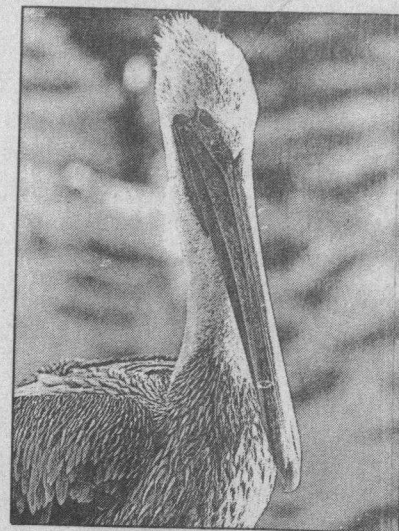
According to Moak-Kean, the costs of antibiotics and food for

the pelicans are staggering. She said Native Animal Rescue, which receives no financial support from local government, cares for more than 3,000 wild birds and animals annually and is supported by donations.

Moak-Kean said the volunteers who help care for the birds have been through Native Animal Rescue's training program.

Warm ocean waters are also causing serious problems for sea lion youngsters.

In Sausalito, a scientist at the See **PELICANS**, Page 4B



Weather conditions are blamed for the brown pelicans' plight.

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## Pelican woes expected to continue

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### ■ PELICANS

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Marine Mammal Center said sea lion yearlings and 2-year-olds are also showing up "by the hundreds," malnourished and underweight.

Marine biologist Hilary Feldman said the young sea lions also have parasites, which has led to many cases of pneumonia. She said the mammal center "has lost quite a few" of the animals but has been successful in treating and feeding many others.

Most of the workers who are treating the sea lions are also volunteers. The center, which also has a facility at Moss Landing, handles distressed animals along the California coastline from the Oregon border to San Luis Obispo County.

Feldman said that warm water off the coast is a residual of last year's El Niño conditions and that fish on which sea lions — and pelicans — normally feed seek cooler water by diving deeper or swimming farther out to sea.

The emaciation of the juvenile brown pelicans is the latest in a string of crises that the species has faced in recent decades.

Two decades ago, pelicans faced extinction because DDT and other pollutants in the environment interfered with breeding by making the birds' shells too thin. The pelican population skyrocketed after DDT was banned.