

Pelicans with domoic acid poisoning

Yesterday, Veterinary Public Health (VPH) was notified by Peter Wallerstein, [Whale Rescue](#), and Santa Monica Animal Control that there was a significant increase in California Brown Pelicans being found ill or dead along the Southern California Coast (Santa Barbara to Los Angeles County) within the last few days. Approximately 30 to 45 pelicans were found sick or dead between Santa Monica and the South Bay. The outbreak is of concern, since California Brown Pelicans are an endangered species.

The outbreak may be due to domoic acid poisoning. The California Department of Health Services issued a press release on March 24th to notify the public that high levels of domoic acid were found in mussels and sardines along the Southern California Coast. Domoic acid can affect both humans and animals (birds, marine mammals, pets), causing both neurological damage and intestinal symptoms. The pelicans demonstrated classical signs of domoic acid poisoning: shaking, wobbly, tremors, occasional seizures, clenched feet, wings held out stiffly and bloodshot eyes.

The International Bird Rescue Research Center in San Pedro is attempting to rehabilitate the ill birds. The Center has also submitted one of the birds that died to VPH for necropsy. Tests will be run to verify that the bird had domoic acid poisoning, and not avian influenza or another infectious disease. Another alert will be sent out once we have the results.

Thank you to Peter Wallerstein, Santa Monica Animal Control and the International Bird Rescue Research Center for reporting these cases. Such reports help us keep everyone informed about local animal disease problems. List members; remember to report all dead birds, animal disease outbreaks, unusual infectious diseases and zoonoses by calling us (562-401-7088) and completing an Animal Disease/Death Reporting form. It is important for us to get accurate information regarding bird deaths, including the location and date, since we are tracking the data for mapping and identifying clusters.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

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