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STATEMENT ON PELICAN MORTALITY EVENT

NO 'SMOKING GUN' – QUESTIONS REMAIN

RECENT DELISTING OF CA BROWN PELICAN DEEMED PREMATURE

Results from comprehensive tests did not reveal a single cause – no 'smoking gun', to explain the hundreds of CA brown pelicans found dead and dying in December and January along the West coast. This leaves researchers at IBRRC to believe it was a combination of conditions, yet a few unanswered questions remain, which will be pursued in the coming months.

To date, IBRRC has received close to 200 CA Brown Pelicans since mid-December - 60 are still in rehabilitation and over 75 have been released. In all, about 75% of them have been 'adults' - at least 3 years old.

While a few pelicans tested positive for domoic acid, the neurotoxin played a secondary, not primary, role in this mortality event. The necrotic tissue on the feet and pouches, observed on some of the pelicans, was likely the result of them being caught in freezing temperatures during an extremely unusual migration.

Given the increasing reports of dramatic and unusual climate changes around the world, it is not inappropriate to connect this phenomenon to the difficult to prove theory of global warming. Unseasonably warm weather and abundant food supply caused an estimated 4,000 pelicans to remain in Oregon and Washington until December when they were caught in record-breaking cold temperatures. They began migrating south, as they should have months before. The mixture of cold weather, physical stress, and then, unstable food supply, likely contributed to this mortality event. However, these conditions do not explain the disoriented behavior exhibited by many of the casualties.

Coincidentally, on February 5, the California Fish and Game Commission voted to remove the CA brown pelican from the Endangered Species List. While this action acknowledges their increased numbers, IBRRC remains opposed to the de-listing as the CA brown pelican, an indicator species, is highly vulnerable. This West coast population remains susceptible to oil spills, domoic acid, botulism, fishing tackle entanglements, cruelty, changes in food supply, and weather fluctuations. IBRRC's contends that it is premature to de-list this species until their population fully reestablishes itself within its range in spite of the adverse conditions it is exposed to in California on a daily basis.