



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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BROWN PELICANS REMOVED FROM ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST IN SOUTHEASTERN STATES

The brown pelican is well, again, and has become the first species to recover from the devastating effects of DDT to the point where it can be removed from the U.S. endangered species list.

The pelican in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and North and South Carolina, and points northward along the Atlantic coast, no longer needs the protections of the Federal Endangered Species Act, according to Interior Secretary William Clark.

The removal does not affect brown pelicans in Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, California, Mexico, Central and South America, and the West Indies, however, where the species is still classified as "endangered," Clark said.

The brown pelican's recovery is due mainly to the decreasing effects of DDT and other pesticides, which caused the bird's decline through both direct poisoning and interference in its reproductive process. Brown pelicans are particularly sensitive to pesticides, and the phenomenon of eggshell thinning from chemical contamination, documented in other bird species, was especially devastating to these large marine birds.

"The brown pelican was jeopardized by pesticide contamination, and its recovery is testimony to the resiliency of the species and the efforts of Federal and State wildlife agencies and private conservation groups to assist that recovery by protecting the bird's rookeries," said Clark. "We're optimistic about the chances for the brown pelican's recovery in the rest of its range, as well."

(over)

Large numbers of brown pelicans nested historically on small coastal islands in Texas, Louisiana, Florida, and the Carolinas. With the advent of DDT and other organochlorine pesticides that entered the food chain, contaminating the fish that make up the bulk of the pelican's food supply, the populations plummeted. By 1961, the brown pelican had disappeared as a nesting species in Louisiana and was vanishing in Texas; the pesticide endrin was later implicated in the pelican's decline in those States. In the East, where problems were not as severe as those along the Gulf Coast, biologists began documenting decreased reproduction among the birds in South Carolina by the early 1970's. DDT and its major breakdown product, DDE, were the cause of that decline.

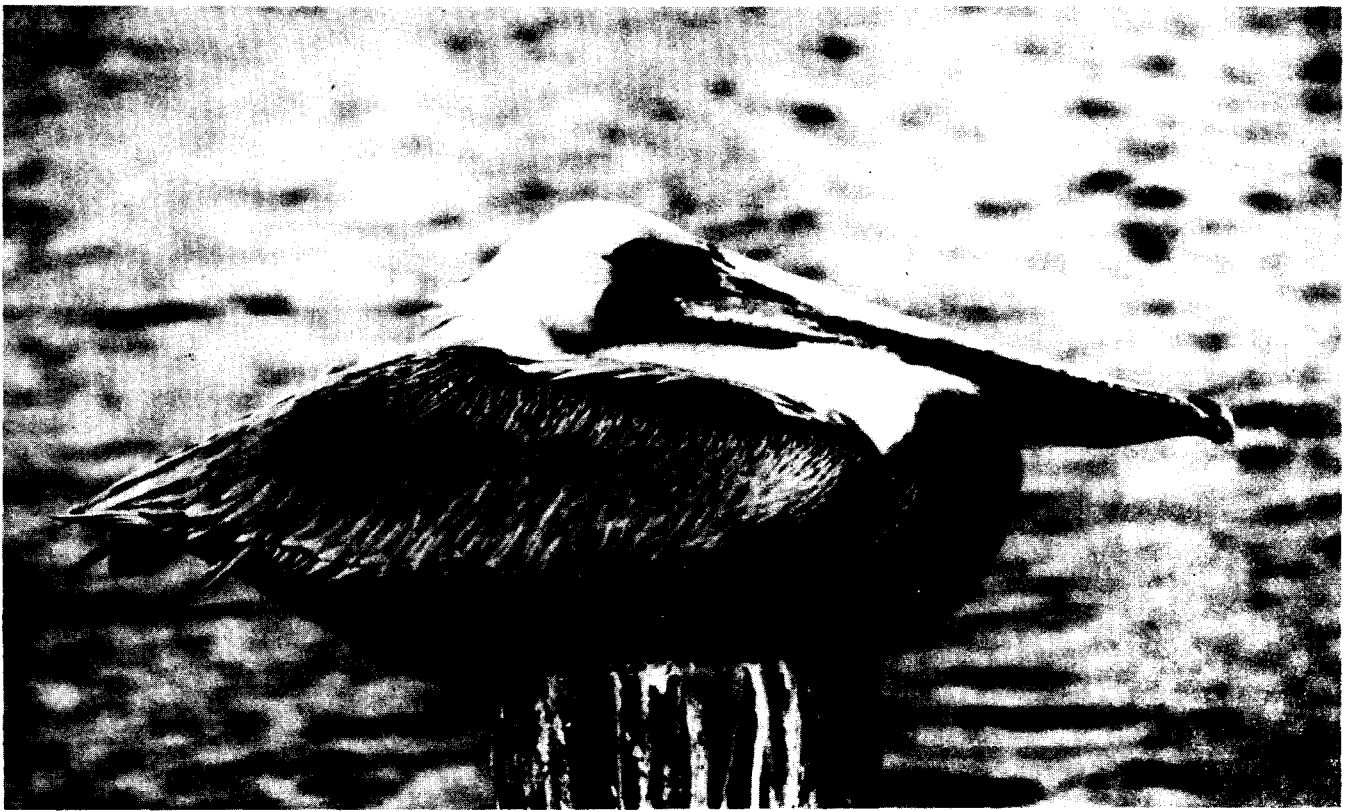
The brown pelican was listed as an endangered species throughout its range in 1970. Since the Environmental Protection Agency's ban on the use of DDT in the United States in 1972 and the restrictions placed on other pesticides, the species has shown a gradual recovery and biologists have noted a corresponding decrease in chemical contaminants in pelican eggs. Annual censuses of the brown pelican in the Southeast now indicate stable or increasing breeding populations in Florida and the Carolinas. The population along the Atlantic and Florida Gulf coasts is now estimated at about 50,000 birds, which is at the approximate level of the population from the 1800's through the 1940's.

The bird also appears on the increase in other States. Biologists say that brown pelicans now occupy all suitable rookery sites in South Carolina and have been expanding into coastal North Carolina. In Alabama, the first records of nestings in that State were made in 1983 and 1984, when brown pelicans were observed nesting in Mobile Bay. And, in an effort to bolster pelican reproduction farther west, wildlife biologists have been transplanting brown pelicans from Florida to Louisiana, where the number of active nests has risen accordingly.

The brown pelican will continue to be protected by the Endangered Species Act in the areas of its range that are not affected by today's action. That Federal law makes it illegal to kill, harm, or trade in protected species, with penalties ranging up to \$20,000 and a year in jail for criminal violations. In addition, the brown pelican continues to receive Federal protection from injury or taking throughout its range under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

-- FWS-61 --

Editors only: Black-and-white photographs and color transparencies of brown pelicans are available on loan from the Audio-Visual Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240 202/343-8770.



Adult brown pelican in south Florida -- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service national photo contest winner by Mike Haramis.



Immature brown pelicans -- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service national photo contest winner by Steve Van Riper.