

ABC7

Offshore Algae Making Birds Fatally Sick

By Subha Ravindhran

May 9, 2007 (KABC-TV) - State wildlife officials are concerned. Hundreds of birds and coastal sea life are dying. Officials call it a "toxic offshore algae bloom." The phenomenon is producing a record level of toxin entering the food chain.

Wildlife officials released rehabilitated pelicans into the San Pedro Bay Wednesday.

They've survived a fatal toxin that's plaguing Southern California coastlines.

"We want answers to all our questions," said Susan Kaveggia of the International Bird Rescue and Research Center. "I think we're hitting the tip of the iceberg here."

Representatives from wildlife centers across Southern California came together to sort out what they now call a crisis.

They say a naturally occurring toxin called Domoic acid has been entering our beaches at the highest levels ever recorded, killing birds and other sea life.

The toxin - which forms on algae - enters the food chain through shellfish, which are then eaten by other animals.

Birds and sea life end up with seizures and eventually die.

Experts say people should stay away from these infected animals and report them immediately.

"We have families putting their children next to sea lions having seizures for a photo opportunity; or people pulling these animals back into the water, which might doom an animal with Domoic acid poisoning; if they have a seizure, they might drown in the water. So please: We urge the public to stay away," said Peter Wallerstein of Whale Rescue Team.

Experts do not know why this toxin is being released at such record levels.

Authorities are now advising the public not to eat locally harvested shellfish, anchovies and other seafood.

Right now hundreds of birds and other sea life are being treated at local wildlife centers like the San Pedro International Bird Research Center.

Experts say most of them do not survive.

But some - like these pelicans - are giving researchers hope that this problem can be solved.

"With all the deaths that we see, getting six out the door it makes it all worthwhile," said Susan Kaveggia.

If you see any ill birds, or beached marine life on the coastline, you're asked to report it immediately.

To report occurrences of infected animals, please call one of the following locations:

San Pedro International Bird Research Center
310-514-2573

Huntington Beach Wetlands and Wildlife Care Center
714-374-5587