Pesticide Kills 300 Pelicans

By CORNELIA CARRIER

Some 300 brown pelicans or 80 per cent of Louisiana's state bird population have died from pesticide poisoning, wildlife officials said Tuesday.

An estimated 100 birds are all that remain of the restocked pelican flock of more than 450, according to J. Burton Angelle, director of the Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission.

Chemical analyses of nine dead pelicans indicated the presence of eight pesticide residues in the brain tissue of the birds, he said.

"All of the birds tested contained what experts regard as lethal doses of endrin," Angelle said.

Endrin is a pesticide 20 to 30 times more toxic than DDT which was banned by the federal government in 1972.

According to a commission spokesman, .3 parts per million (ppm) of endrin is considered lethal. The dead pelicans analyzed by the LSU Feed and Fertilizer Laboratory in Baton Rouge showed levels as high as .68 ppm. One bird showed a .22 level, but the others were .3 or above.

Angelle identified the other pesticides, all persistent chlorinated hydrocarbons extensively used to kill insects, as: dieldrin, toxaphene, DDE (a breakdown product of DDT), BHC (Benzene hexachloride), HCB (chlorobenzene), PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls) and Heptachlor eporide.

Alan Ensminger, chief of the commission's Refuge Division, said he was surprised at the high levels of toxaphene that ranged from 2.7 to 12.1.

Toxaphene is used on rice crops and endrin on cotton crops. Angelle and Ensminger said that there is ample evidence to indicate the pesticide residues are coming down the Mississippi River from states to the north.

The brown pelican, which once numbered in the thousands, began disappearing in Louisiana in the late fifties. The die-off was then tentatively attributed to pesticides, and Ensminger said the recent die-off tends to reinforce this theory.

In 1968, the state imported 46 birds from Florida to form a breeding colony near Grand Isle. The first successful nesting was in 1971, and the colony began to flourish with natural reproduction equalling natural mortality.

The deaths began occurring in May and reached their peak in late May and early June. During the second week of June, Ensminger said, only 45 birds were sighted during an aerial flight over the Grand Isle nesting area.

"The same time last year,

Cont. in Sec. 1, Page 12, Col. 5

Pelicans

Continued from Page 1

185 birds were sighted, indicating a huge drop in the number of freeflying adult pelicans," he said.

Only 13 bodies of dead birds have been recovered, he said, explaining that the dead brown pelicans blend in with the vegetation or are eaten by other creatures.

According to Ensminger, the pelican deaths "prove that chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides, used in remote areas far from the coast, filter down to Louisiana's estuaries and affect fish and wildlife and everything to some degree."

Plans are underway to import another 100 pelicans from Florida to try to rebuild the flock.

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