Audubon Texas Welcomes Delisting of Brown Pelican as Endangered Species

AUSTIN, TX – 12 November 2009 ---Audubon Texas welcomes the delisting of Brown Pelican from the Endangered Species List but say challenges continue. According to Audubon's annual Christmas Bird Count, Brown Pelican population trends have risen in Texas for the past 40-50 years. Hurricane Katrina took a toll on the Gulf Coast populations but prospects remain good provided coastal recovery stays on track. The health of local waters is an issue for birds as is it for humans; a young pelican consumes about 150 pounds of fish the first 9 weeks of its life.

The species once decimated by DDT and habitat loss has sufficiently recovered to be removed from the list of threatened and endangered species this week. However, additional federal laws, such as the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Lacey Act, will continue to protect the brown pelican, its nests and its eggs.

"Thanks to years of collaboration with federal, state, and local entities, we can celebrate the hard work that has lead to this announcement," said Bob Benson, executive director of Audubon Texas. He emphasized, "The Audubon Texas Coastal Stewardship Program relies on seasonal wardens to manage more than 13,000 acres on 80 islands for the benefit of our Texas coastal ecosystem and the birds and other wildlife that depend on it. Increasing the number of breeding birds from 12 to 12,000 since 1973 is a huge achievement, and was accomplished by a host of part-time wardens, volunteers, and conservation partners over several decades."

"This is a real win for the Endangered Species Act," said David Newstead, president of the Coastal Bend Audubon Chapter. "Now we just need to maintain this great momentum and continue our vigilance to ensure other coastal species do not become endangered."

Continued monitoring of Brown Pelicans is essential to detect any unexpected future population declines. Conservationists also caution that proper site selection, operational guidelines and vigilance will be needed to ensure that proposed wind power projects don't threaten recovery in Texas and other areas. Other potential threats include increasing levels of human disturbance on rookery islands and climate change.

Audubon Texas' director of conservation and education, Iliana Pena, added, "Audubon wardens are a big part of the success of this announcement. For generations these front line conservationists have patrolled and monitored by boat during nesting season. They also organize volunteers, educate citizens, and work with anglers. This community-based stewardship has sustained one of the most effective bird conservation programs in the country."

Audubon Texas is the state program of the National Audubon Society. We are working with local chapters, cities, state agencies, and public and private landowners to restore three million acres of grassland habitat, manage 13,000 acres of island sanctuaries along the Texas coast and educate 50,000 students and adults on an annual basis.
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