PROTECTING LEAST TERNS DURING AN OIL SPILL

A Test of the Attraction of Artificial Fish Ponds

by

Kathy Keane
Keane Biological Consulting
California Least Tern Nesting
California Least Tern Foraging
California Least Tern Statewide Population

NUMBER OF NESTING PAIRS
Major Concentrations of California Least Tern Nesting

- Alameda Pt
- Point Mugu
- LA Harbor
- Camp Pendleton
- Batiquitos Lagoon
- NAB Coronado
- Tijuana Estuary
- avg remaining 23 sites
Experimental Questions

- Does the creation of an artificial food source attract California Least Terns (CLT) to the extent that their foraging is reduced at known, preferred foraging areas (PFAs)?
- How much is CLT foraging reduced at PFAs?
- Can CLT be lured away from PFAs for three consecutive days?
- Will the experiment work with a simple backyard pool that can be easily purchased at a local department store?
- Will the experiment work using readily available fish (e.g. mosquito fish or anchovies from bait barges)?
- How many pools and how many fish are needed to feed a specified number of CLT?
California Least Tern

Foraging is Opportunistic

- In the 1970s, Orange County Vector Control placed a cattle trough filled with water and fish near a CLT nesting area.

- Several CLT discovered the food source immediately and began diving into the trough for fish. Many CLT fed at the trough for the next two days.

- This concept was modified and used again in 1979:
Specific Location of Study Site: Los Angeles Harbor
Known, Preferred Foraging Areas (comparison foraging stations)

F = foraging dives
T = transit flights
Experiment Setup

1. Pool supplies
2. Pool being filled
3. AmQuel bottle
4. Pool being treated
Mosquito Fish Delivery

(we used mosquito fish instead of anchovies due to assured availability)
Large Pool with light background
Floating Pool #1
Floating Pool #2
Finally, 3 days later, some interest!
Foraging at Large Pool
Why the delay for foraging in pools?

1) Algae growth

2) Chick Hatching:
   Foraging dives at pools began June 9; first chick June 9;
   30 chicks by June 11;
   238 more by June 15.
Mean CLT Dives per Survey

- P300: 7.13
- P400 elbow: 5.50
- ENS: 1.92
- LARGE POOL: 0.58
- SMALL POOL: 0.17
Conclusions

- Some CLT will use and successfully obtain fish from the pools.
- Some CLT may exhibit territorial behavior over the pool(s).
- The pools with clear water were not as attractive to CLT as pools with a heavy growth of green algae.
- Size matters. There were more CLT dives into the large (10-ft diameter) murky pool than the smaller (8-ft diameter) murky pool, and very few dives into the small clear-water pool.
- The intensity of foraging never exceeded more than 4 dives per 10-minute survey period. Thus, in the event of an oil spill, the pools would not be successful in diverting large numbers of least terns from oil spill areas. However, if the oil spill is in a PFA and it affects the availability of CLT prey, it's possible the pools would become more heavily used.
Answers to Questions

- Does the creation of an artificial food source attract California Least Terns (CLT) to the extent that their foraging is reduced at known, preferred foraging areas (PFAs)? **NO**

- How much is CLT foraging at reduced at PFAs? **NOT NOTICEABLY**

- Can CLT be lured away from PFAs for three consecutive days? **NO**

- Will the experiment work with a simple backyard pool that can be easily and quickly purchased at a local department store? **YES**

- Will the experiment work using readily available fish (e.g. mosquito fish) **YES** (or anchovies from bait barges)? **UNKNOWN**

- How many pools and how many fish are needed to feed a specified number of CLT? **UNKNOWN** *(20 x 1800 = 36000 fish)*
Recommendations
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