

Wildlife thrives on a N. Nevada desert island

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

In a lake that's arguably one of the most unique in the world, it's a special place in its own right.

Anaho Island, located off the east shore of Pyramid Lake, is a volcanic formation studded with odd-shaped tufa deposits.

It's one of the few American white pelican nesting colonies in North America. This year, thanks to plentiful water and lots of fish for food, four times the number of pelican chicks were produced than were last year.

A desert island in a desert lake, it teems with life – both feathered and scaled.

"This island is really amazing," said Donna Withers, a refuge specialist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Withers, who spends her time on the island studying pelicans and other inhabitants, said this year was an important one for Anaho.

That's because like other places, Anaho benefited substantially from a big winter that left a huge mountain snowpack, swelling the region's rivers and streams and raising the levels of lakes and reservoirs.

One result was a huge spawning run for Pyramid Lake's cui-ui fish, a primary food source for pelicans. A big year for cui-ui translates to a big nesting year for pelicans.

After only about 500 pelican chicks were produced during nesting season last year, roughly 8,000 adult pelicans converged on the island this spring and summer, producing

about 2,000 juveniles, Withers said. The adults hung around in large numbers, producing and protecting their young because of the presence of plentiful food.

“With the amazing cui-ui run we had, that success will translate to the pelicans,” said Beverly Harry, environmental manager for the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe.

“It’s an amazing relationship,” Harry said. “The pelicans have always been here. This is their home.”

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