

2008 American White Pelican Banding Summary at Medicine Lake NWR,  
Medicine Lake, MT  
Compiled by Crystal A. Bechaver (9/08)

Pelicans nested on Bridgerman Point and Gull Island in 2008, with a total of 2157 nests. This was well below the 10-year average of 3755 nests. A total of 1984 pelican nests were counted on Bridgerman Point on 27 May. The colony was split up into three pods. The eastern most pod, located in the trees on the northern side of the peninsula, was hatching. Most of the nests, in this pod, had one egg and one chick. Hatching had not occurred within the other two pods.

Pelicans were also observed nesting on Gull Island. A census of the gull, pelican, and cormorant nests on the island was conducted on 30 May 2008. A total of 173 pelican nests were counted, while most of the nests had at least one young. Only 5% of the nests were unhatched. We also counted 245 California gulls and 102 double-crested cormorant nests.

On 7 July 2008, five banders and ten helpers banded 358 young pelicans, on Bridgerman Point. On 11 July 2008, a banding mortality check was conducted by walking around the colony looking for dead banded birds. Only one dead pelican was found. Mortality checks for disease outbreaks were then carried out one day a week until 16 September 2008. A total of 40 bands was recovered, for an estimated juvenile mortality rate of 11%. Mortality was spread out through the summer, with no apparent disease spikes taking place. West Nile virus was detected in mosquitoes collected on the Refuge by Montana State University during August, but pelicans seemed to be unaffected or affected at a very low rate. A sub-sample of the dead pelicans was sampled and tested for WNV, but results are not yet available.