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NONLETHAL CONTROL OF EGG PREDATION BY RAVENS AT CALIFORNIA LEAST TERN COLONIES, CAMP PENDLETON, CALIFORNIA. Avery, M.L., C.E. Knittle, and G.M. Linz, USDA/Denver Wildlife Research Center, 2820 E. University Ave., Gainesville, FL 32641. Phone: Comm. (904) 375-2229; Fax (904) 377-5559.

As part of a 4-year study of raven-least tern interactions, we evaluated a nonlethal approach for reducing predation on eggs of the California least tern. The study was conducted at Camp Pendleton, CA where recovery of least tern populations has been hampered by a variety of avian and mammalian predators. In 1991, near their nest sites, we exposed 9 pairs of territorial ravens to Coturnix quail eggs injected with 30 mg of methiocarb, an aversive agent known for its birds repellent properties. Within 4 or 5 days, all pairs learned to avoid the treated eggs, and removal of test eggs was minimal during the 4-week trial period. In 1992, we applied this technique at 3 least tern colonies at Camp Pendleton. Beginning 3 weeks prior to the terns' arrival, we deployed 10 treated eggs at each site and monitored their status daily for 7 weeks. Corvids removed treated eggs at each of the sites, but there was no predation on least tern eggs. Furthermore, unlike in previous years, there was no need for lethal control measures to be used against ravens to protect the tern colonies. Although this technique is still experimental, we feel that nonlethal methods such as this offer reasonable alternatives to lethal methods when the intensive management of avian egg predators is necessary.