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Pelican numbers rise after DDT

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Federal wildlife officials say they are drafting a proposal to take the brown pelican off the endangered species list in Louisiana — the Pelican State — and Texas, some 40 years after the bird was nearly wiped out by DDT.

In the spring, more than 16,000 pairs of the big bird are expected to nest on Louisiana's barrier islands, where 1,276 fledglings imported from Florida replaced the flocks that crowded the coast in the first half of the last century.

"It's really pretty neat, the way they've done so well," said Tom Hess, the state biologist in charge of Louisiana's nesting census.

Last year, he said, 16,405 nesting pairs produced 34,641 young, compared with 13,766 pairs and 22,650 fledglings in 2000. In Texas, 2,400 pairs nested last year.

While wildlife officials are seeking to have the birds removed from the federal

endangered list in both states, Edith Ersling of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service office in Clear Lake, Texas, said similar proposals have been pushed aside by more urgent concerns.

Like many other birds, pelicans were almost wiped out by the pesticide DDT, which caused them to lay eggs with shells too thin to protect developing embryos.

By the middle of the 20th century, the only sustainable populations were in Florida, where the first national wildlife refuge was created in 1903 on Pelican Island.

In 1968 — six years after Louisiana's last wild nest had been found and four years before DDT was banned — the state began bringing fledglings in from Florida.

Between then and 1980, Hess said, 1,276 fledglings were released at three sites. State workers went out every day and fed the birds until they could fly and catch

their own food. By then, the islands were their home.

From 1984 to 1986, fledglings descended from those birds were taken to Queen Bess Island, one of the barrier colonies, to other areas.

Twenty years ago, they were a rare sight. Now you can see one or more almost any time you cross the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway or take a ferry across the Mississippi. Scores crowd breakwaters along the lake's north shore.

In 1998, Hurricane Georges ripped Louisiana's barrier islands. The count the next year dropped by half, but rebounded.

"It's not because the birds were killed, it's just because they're very traditional, they like to go back to the same place after year," said James Harris, chief biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in southeast Louisiana.

Scientists to use processing power for anthrax research

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — A coalition of scientists and technology companies is asking people around the world to use their computers' extra processing power to help search for a cure for anthrax.

The project follows similar efforts to use "distributed computing" to hunt for extraterrestrial life and a cure for cancer.

This effort is being launched Tuesday to help Oxford University researchers find potential ways to treat anthrax that is beyond the stage at which antibiotics can work. It comes as fighting anthrax and other agents of bioterrorism has become an international priority.

The project is based on the premise that the average personal computer uses between 13 percent and 18 percent of its processing power at any given time. Like Napster, it employs "peer-to-peer" technology, in which millions of computers can share files over the Internet.

Participants download a screen-saver that runs whenever their computers have resources to spare, and uses that power to perform computations for the project. When the user connects to the Internet, the computer sends data back to a central hub and gets another assignment.

The company that designed the program, United Devices Inc. of Austin, Texas, promises that no personal information on participants' PCs can be compromised while they take part.

With enough participants, the project gives researchers 10 times more power than the world's best supercomputer, said Graham Richards, the Oxford professor leading the study.

"The screen-saver doesn't cost you anything, and at least you're taking part in something, adding your bit," he said.

Scientists have discovered that the anthrax toxin is made up of three proteins — which are not toxic on their own but become so after binding together.

The Oxford scientists want to scan 3.5 billion molecular compounds to see if any can block the process and keep the toxin from reproducing.

The results, which could serve as blueprints for late-stage anthrax drugs, will be turned over to the U.S. and British governments, Richards said.

The project is funded by Intel Corp. and Microsoft Corp. and supported by the National Foundation for Cancer Research.

A similar program launched last April, to help Richards' team find a molecule that might counteract a protein involved in the growth of leukemia, is harnessing the power of 1.3 million PCs around the world.

"We're now in a new era of computing directed at improving the quality of life," said Pat Gelsinger, chief technology officer at Santa Clara-based Intel.

NEWS IN BRIEF

5th person gets artificial heart

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — 51-year-old man who last year became the world's fifth recipient of a self-contained artificial heart has been released from a hospital to a nearby hotel, doctors said Monday.

James Quinn, 51, was released Jan. 14 from Hahnemann University Hospital, exactly 70 days after being implanted with the AbioCor artificial heart.

"We are very happy to see James. We hope he can begin to truly enjoy his family in a non-hospital setting," Dr. Louis Samuel, surgical director of the cardiac transplant team, said in a statement.

The retired baker as grandfather from West Philadelphia was released to a hotel about three blocks from the hospital with caregivers in an adjoining room.

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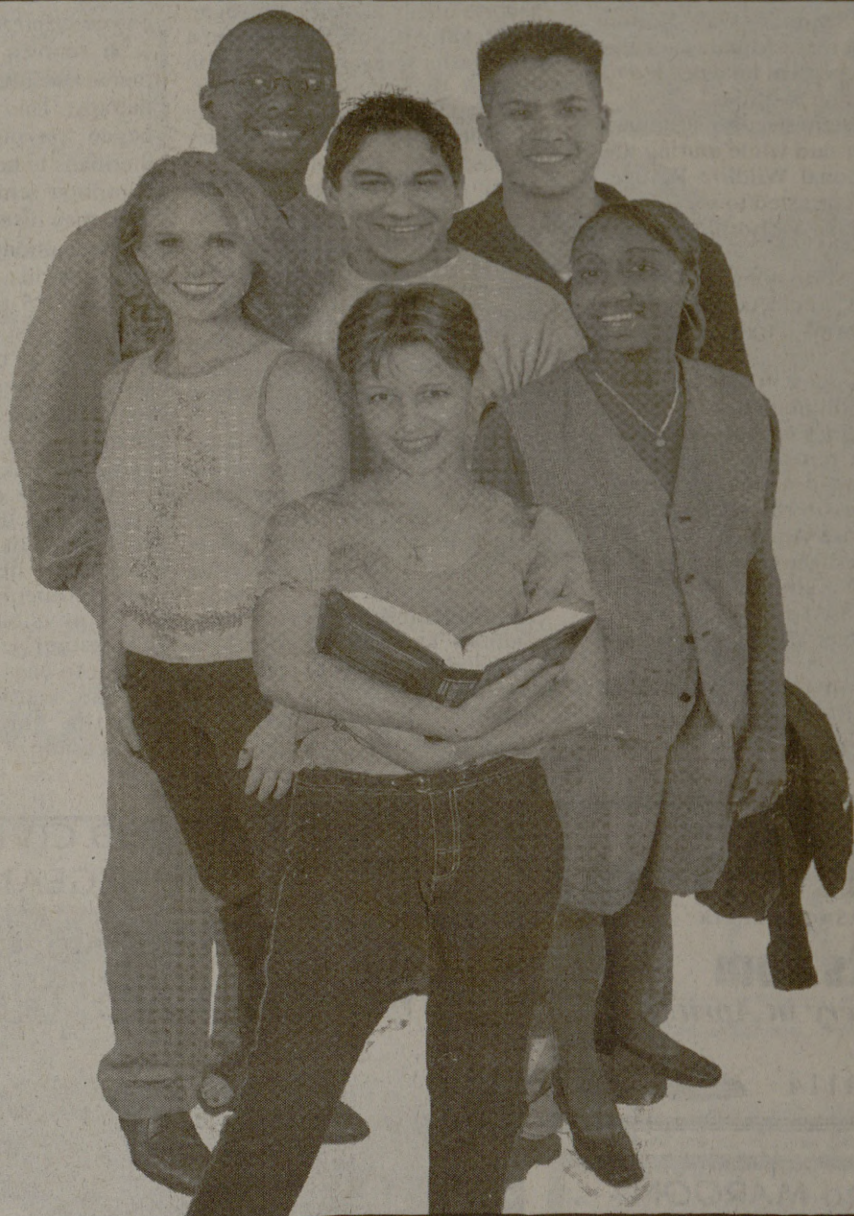
Houston Community College System is offering discounted tuition on select courses offered at certain locations throughout the system as part of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Reduced Tuition Pilot Program made possible by the Texas Legislature's passage of HB 1465.

For a complete listing of reduced tuition classes, pick up a Spring 2002 Class Schedule or call 713-718-2000.



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