

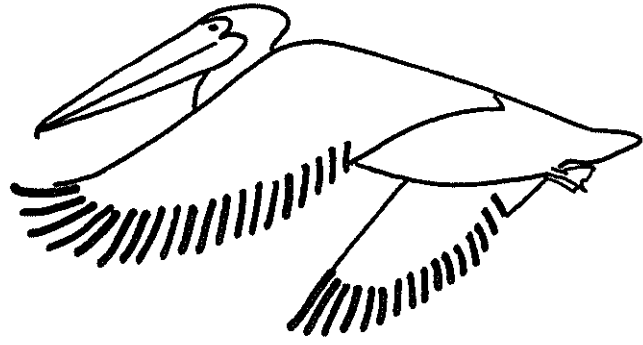
# Pelicans

Pelicans are large, robust birds that feed on fish and crustaceans. Hanging under their long, flat bill is a voluminous, fleshy throat pouch, which is inflated only when the pelican is underwater snatching prey. Contrary to popular opinion, the pelican's pouch is not used to carry or store fish. It serves as a scoop to separate the fish from the water. When deflated, the pouch is flat and not noticeable.

Populations of Brown pelicans, *Pelicanus occidentalis*, were nearly obliterated due to insecticides (such as DDT), which accumulate in the fish the pelicans eat. The insecticide caused the pelican's eggs to be thin-shelled or broken, and young pelicans died before hatching. Fortunately, the Brown pelican population is now recovering.

Brown pelicans have a wingspan of about six and a half feet. They are strictly coastal and are found from the North Carolina to Florida and the Gulf of Mexico. When searching for fish, pelicans cruise close to the water, gliding for long distances with only an occasional flap of their wings. Once they spot food, the Brown pelicans ascend into the air and drop straight down head first into the water, producing a large splash. Usually they feed on fish that school near the surface, such as mullet, herring, and menhaden. Frigate birds, terns, and gulls constantly harass the pelicans and try to steal their food. Pelicans nest in trees or on the ground of small islands in shallow bay areas. Any human disturbance of the nesting site during breeding is very detrimental to successful hatching.

White pelicans, *Pelicanus erythrorhynchos*, have an incredible nine-foot wingspan. They breed along the West coast and in the central United States near lakes, marshes, and beaches. In the winter they migrate to the Everglades and Florida Keys. Unlike the Brown pelicans, the White pelican scoops up fish while swimming rather than by dive bombing in from the sky.



White pelican  
*Pelicanus erythrorhynchos*  
size: 50 inches long,  
110 inch wingspan!

Brown pelican  
*Pelicanus occidentalis*  
size: 40 inches long  
90 inch wingspan

