

*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*

# American White Pelican

## Linking Communities

It is the American White Pelican's vulnerability to human disturbances and pollutants that makes it a candidate as a "target species" for the Linking Communities Project. Because the American White Pelican is at the top of the aquatic food chain it is vulnerable to biomagnification and bioaccumulation of pollutants. The American White Pelican is highly gregarious and its colonial habits are seen in many aspects of the life cycle. Therefore, large habitats that can support this colonial life style are required. Breeding grounds can be located as far as 60 km from feeding sites which is why linking these communities to protect the American White Pelican's habitat from degradation is so important.



Photo: Randy McCulloch

## Identification

With a wingspan of nine feet and a long orange bill the American White Pelican is hard to mistake. It is a large bird with a short tail, short legs and an extendable pouch on the lower bill. It is all white with black flight feathers that are only seen while in flight.

## Habitat & Distribution

Flocks as large as 180 birds can be seen migrating to and from the wintering grounds on the both coasts of southern US and Mexico. Flying over mountains and deserts its dependency on water means The American White Pelican only stops where water bodies are present. Breeding occurs on isolated islands located in freshwater lakes. As it is difficult to find areas large enough for breeding, these sites can be as far as 60 km from foraging sites. During non-breeding season it can be found on coastal bays, inlets, and estuaries.

## Feeding

Unlike the Brown Pelican the American White Pelican does not dive for fish but rather scoops them up by dipping its head under the water. Cooperative feeding strategies can be seen where groups of pelicans herd fish into shallow water by flapping their wings and dipping their bills. It has been known to forage on land for crayfish, tadpoles, and salamanders but this not as successful.

## Nesting

The American White Pelican nests in colonies on islands with little vegetation and bare ground. The nest consists of a shallow depression on the ground with a low rim and no lining and is created by the pelican sitting and pulling in the soil and vegetation around it with its bill. The American White Pelican is sensitive to human disturbances causing it to leave the nest and in turn exposing the eggs to predators and the elements. Two to three white eggs are normally laid and then incubated by both parents. The chicks are born blind and helpless. The first chick to hatch can be known to commit siblicide harassing and killing its younger siblings.

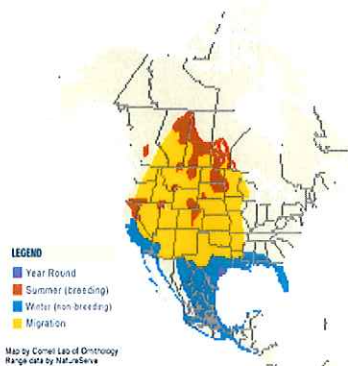


Photo: Dan McIntosh