

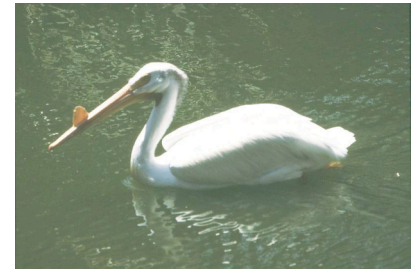
AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN

PELECANIFORMES

Family: Pelecanidae

Genus: Pelecanus

Species: erythrorynchos



K Chadbourne Collection

Range: Winters along West and Gulf coasts extending to Costa Rica / Breeds central NA.

Habitat: Coastal waters, large inland lakes, lagoons and estuaries

Niche: Aquatic, carnivorous, diurnal

Biomes:

Wild diet: Fish and crustaceans

Zoo diet: Variety of available small fish

Life Span: (Wild)
(Captive)

Sexual dimorphism: Female is smaller

Location in SF Zoo: Lower Lake

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

These are large white birds with black primaries and a large orange or salmon colored bill. Bare skin around the bill is blue-grey, eyes orange-yellow, legs and feet orange-red. The bill can be up to 15" with the "gular pouch" attached to the sides of the lower mandible. During breeding season both sexes have a raised out-growth "centerboard" midway along the upper mandible that is then shed during the fall molt. The tail is short and their feet have four toes, joined together by webbing (totipalmate) and their legs are short and thick.

In flight the pelican normally carries its prey in the gullet so that the pouch can be retracted. The pouch also assists in keeping the bird cool by creating a large surface area for evaporation when it is extended.

Weight: 10 - 17 lbs.

Length / Height: from 4 - 6 ft

Wing span: 8 - 9 1/2 ft

STATUS & CONSERVATION

They are now doing well with the cleanup of waters polluted with toxic chemicals and the banning of DDT in 1972. However habitat reduction and human disturbances remain issues of concern.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

As with most pelicans they are virtually voiceless in their activities. When hunting pelicans forms in teams that gather on the water, with their wings partly open to cast a shadow making it easier to see their prey. They form a line or large circle to drive fish into shallow water and gradually close in on them. This movement is synchronized, as are their flights that sometimes form a "V" formation. Even with pneumatic skeletons the must run vigorously on the water to get airborne. Flight is a combination of flapping and sailing, not rapid but steady.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

These birds breed in the prairie pothole region of North America. Courtship is usually short and unspectacular with pair formation occurring immediately preceding egg-laying. Mound nests are built in large gregarious breeding colonies. Normally only one chick is raised to fledging. With altricial young the adults feed them by dribbling a watery food into their mouths. As the chicks become stronger they are able to reach into their parent's gullet to reach the partially digested fish.

Incubation: 40 - 42 days	Sexual Maturity: several years
# of young: 2 - 4 whitish eggs	Fledging: 5 weeks

MISCELLANEOUS

- ◆ Adults may eat 5 to 10 % of their own weight a day
- ◆ Of the eight known species, six are found in the Old World and two in the New World. They are chiefly inhabitants of tropical and warm areas.

Sources:

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Audubon Society FG to NA Birds (Western region) © 1977 p.474
Illustrated Encyclopedia of Birds of the World © 2004 by David Alderton