
American White Pelican

Pelecanus erythrorhychos

Class: *Aves*

Order: *Pelecaniformes*

Family: *Pelecanidae*

Characteristics:

American white pelicans are one of the largest birds in North America and can weigh up to 30 pounds. The massive yellow-orange bill with large fleshy pouch for feeding is their defining characteristic. The body is white and the wings are edged with black primary feathers. They are also known as tough-billed pelican ([Arkive](#)).

Behavior:

Pelicans have been seen working in groups to herd fish into shallow areas where they can easily scoop them up for feeding. They feed on the surface by scooping their bills under the water. They may even up-end and feed like a dabbling duck but the American white pelicans will not dive to feed like brown pelicans ([Cornell Lab](#)).

Reproduction:

During breeding season, white pelicans develop yellowish feathers on the head, chest and neck and their feet become bright orange-red. The bill turns a brighter orange and a large vertical horn develops on the upper mandible of the males. During courtship, they form large colonies on islands to avoid predation. They construct a shallow ground nest and lay an average of two eggs which are incubated by both parents for approximately 30 days. The chicks are altricial, meaning completely dependent on the parents which feed them regurgitated food for about the first three weeks. After that, the chicks form a crèche (group) for protection and will fledge at around 10 weeks.

Diet:

Wild: Fish

Zoo: Fish

Conservation:

The 1960s saw a significant decline in the white pelican population, but since then protection of nesting grounds and protection of habitat has resulted in an increase and stabilization of their populations.

FYI:

During breeding season, you can identify male white pelicans by the large bump on the top of their bill.



Range & Habitat:

Waterways throughout North America



Lifespan: up to 25 years in captivity, 15 years in the wild.

Special Adaptations: The amazing expandable pouch on their lower mandible can hold lots of fish!

IUCN Conservation Status:

Least Concern

