

American White Pelican

Pelecanus erythrorhynchos

One of the largest North American birds, the American White Pelican is majestic in the air. The birds soar with incredible steadiness on broad, white-and-black wings. Their large heads and huge, heavy bills give them a prehistoric look. On the water they dip their pouched bills to scoop up fish, or tip-up like an oversized dabbling duck. Sometimes, groups of pelicans work together to herd fish into the shallows for easy feeding. Look for them on inland lakes in summer and near coastlines in winter.

Keys to Identification

Adult Description

- Large, white waterbird.
- Long bill with extensible pouch.
- Legs short.
- Body large and heavy.
- Feet webbed.
- Wings long and broad, with black trailing edge.
- Tail short.

Immature Description

Juvenile similar to adult, but with dirty grayish markings on head and back.

Cool Facts

- The White Pelican does not dive for fish as the Brown Pelican does. Instead, it dips its head underwater to scoop up fish. Several pelicans may fish cooperatively, moving into a circle to concentrate fish, and then dipping their heads under simultaneously to catch fish.
- American White Pelicans must provide roughly 150 pounds of food to nourish a chick from its birth to the time it's ready to forage on its own.
- American White Pelican embryos squawk before hatching to express discomfort if conditions get too hot or cold.
- The oldest known American White Pelican at least 23 years, 6 months old and was banded in North Dakota in 1983.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 50 - 65 inches
- Wingspan - 96.1 - 114.2 inches (8.0 - 9.5 feet)
- Weight - 158.7 - 317.5 ounces (9.9 - 19.8 pounds)

