

Australian Pelican



Description

The Australian pelican is a predominantly white bird with black wings, fully webbed feet and a pink bill. It can have a wingspan of up to 2 and a half metres and has been recorded as having the longest bill of any living bird which has the capacity to hold up to 13 litres of water. To feed they scoop up fish with the water, expel the water then eat the fish. Pelicans can remain in the air for up to 24 hours at a time covering hundreds of kilometres as they are excellent soarers. They are able to fly at heights of 1,000 to 3,000 metres whilst reaching air speeds of up to 56 km/hour with minimum effort.

Social Life

Australian pelicans are expected to live to around 25 year of age in the wild. Pelicans may live and feed alone but more often they are seen in cooperative groups with some of these groups reaching numbers of over 1,900 birds. The female pelican can lay up to 3 eggs at one time with both male and female pelican incubating the eggs on their feet.

Scientific name

Pelecanus Conspicillatus

Diet & Habitat

A pelican's bill and pouch plays a very important role when feeding as it is sensitive and helps to locate fish in water. Once something has been caught the bird will then empty the water from the bill and position the prey into a swallowing position. The Australian pelican relies on a diet of fish, crustaceans, shrimps, turtles, tadpoles, frogs and on occasion they are known to steal food from other birds. They can be found everywhere around Australia as well as Western Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and on occasion even as far as New Zealand and the Pacific Island. The pelicans habitat is freshwater, estuarine and marine wetlands and waterways including lakes, swamps, rivers, coastal islands and shores. They like to swim on the surface of shallow waters searching for food and are often seen roosting on sandbars, beaches, jetties and piles afterwards.

Threats

Major threats to the Australian pelican include habitat destruction, introduced predators, pollution and fishing waste.

Did you know?

Pelican chicks communicate with their mothers while still in the egg. They can communicate as to whether they are too hot or cold. They also listen to their parents from the egg so when they emerge they have no trouble identifying their parents.

