

## Description

The Australian Pelican is the largest of all eight pelican species worldwide, growing up to 1.8m in length and a wingspan of 2.5m. Although they are large they are quite light, weighing between 4-7 kg. This enables the pelican to fly for long periods of up to 24 hours without using too much energy. Pelicans will soar warm thermals rather than a sustained flapping flight reaching heights between 1000 and 3000m and speeds of up to 56km/hr. Adult pelicans are predominately black and white with a large salmon pink bill and pouch. The bill of the pelican is the largest bill of any bird species growing up to 50cm. Below the bill is an extremely flexible pouch capable of holding 13L of water at one time.

## Distribution

The Australian pelican can be found around any large bodies of water around Australia except for the dry centre. The pelicans also inhabit New Zealand, parts of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Pelicans will inhabit any areas where the water is suitable enough to supply them with fish.

## Diet

Pelicans are opportunistic feeders feeding primarily on fish, however they have been known to feed on small crustaceans, tadpoles and turtles. Pelicans feed by plunging their bill into the water. The pouch scoops up the fish and any surrounding water. The pouch is pressed up against the throat and this pushes excess water out of the bill so only the food remains.

## Breeding

Pelicans are colonial breeders that have been found in colonies of up to 40000 individuals. They rely on a good wet season for breeding which occurs around large bodies of water. The males put on courtship displays for the females, using their large bills to swipe at one another, and putting on shows to impress her by throwing bits of debris in the air and then catching it. The female makes the nest by digging a shallow hole in the ground which she fills with feathers, grass and twigs. Two to three eggs are laid and both parents take turn incubating the eggs on their webbed feet. This lasts for 32-35 days, after which the chicks hatch featherless and blind. The first to hatch is usually larger and will sometimes attack and even kill the other siblings. The young leave their nests after about a month to form crèches with other juveniles where they remain for about two months. After this they are fairly independent and can fly. Australian pelicans live anywhere between 10-25 years or more.

## Threats

Threats to Pelicans include humans, pesticides concentrated in the fish they eat can make their eggshells weak leading to egg loss during breeding seasons, plastic bags are a problem as they resemble jellyfish floating in the water which can be ingested and cause strangulation, and also fishing line and hooks as they can become entangled around the animal or tear their delicate pouch.

**NAME:** *Pelecanua Conspicillatus*  
**Kingdom:** Animalia  
**Phylum:** Chordata  
**Sub Phylum:** Vertebrata  
**Class:** Aves  
**Order:** Pelecaniformes  
**Family:** Pelecanidae

