



Pelicans live mainly in warm regions near coasts and estuaries and breed on small coastal islands. Some travel hundreds of kilometres far inland to breed in lakes and wetlands. Breeding time is inconsistent, depending upon environmental conditions, (particularly rainfall) rather than on particular months or seasons.

Gender can readily be determined by the length of the beak. In males it is up to 42 cm and in females it is much shorter.

Courting rituals are interesting. Males will follow a prospective female around, swinging their beaks from side to side to attract her attention. Another tactic is to pick up small sticks or dry fish and toss them into the air and catch them.

As the procession goes on, males drop out one by one and the last one left is escorted by the female to the prospective nest site. The female makes a simple nest (which is merely a scrape in the ground) and lines it with feathers and scraps of vegetation.



Both parents help to incubate the eggs (usually up to three) by holding them on their feet all through the 32 to 35 day period. They will communicate about whether the temperature is too hot or too cold.

After about a month the chicks are moved into crèches where they remain for another two months, being fed by the parents who can easily distinguish their own progeny from the 100 or more chicks in the “nursery.”

After this period, and having learned to fly, the chicks will have become fairly independent and will be ready at about 3 to 4 months of age, for the often extremely long journey back to the coast. Young pelicans have mottled brown feathers on their backs until they are about one year old.

Being very social animals, pelicans are usually seen in groups (known as “pods”, “scoops” or “squadrons.”)

As a group they hunt fish by herding them into the shallows or into ever decreasing circles to make catching easier.

Flight statistics of the pelican are amazing.



An excellent soarer and an efficient user of thermals it is able to rise up to 3000 meters. By moving from one thermal to the next it can travel effortlessly for up to 24 hours without landing.



The Australian Pelican is the largest type of pelican in the world. Being amongst the heaviest flying birds, with a skeleton of 1.10 of its body weight, it flies effortlessly because of its very light bones.

These are not hollow, (unlike those of most birds) but are filled with a substance somewhat resembling surfboard foam. As well, "air bags" are located in the pelican's bones, neck, chest, skin and wing and these improve aerodynamics in flight. Oil glands on a pelican's back helps it to preen its feathers and to remain waterproof.

The large pouch can hold three bucketfuls of fish or up to 3 gallons of water, which is 2 to 3 times its stomach capacity.

The pouch is used for catching fish, crustaceans, small turtles, and occasionally seagulls and ducklings, all of which are swallowed whole. The open beak is a most efficient collector of drinking water.

The pelican breathes through holes in its beak which also has a hook at the end for gripping slippery food items.



HAZARDS PELICANS FACE

Local people too often witness distressing sights of our pelicans being injured or killed through the thoughtless discarding of fishing tackle by recreational fishers. It is believed that pelicans are unable to distinguish between spider silk and nylon line and so they take no avoiding action. Tangled clumps of line can readily disable them and they frequently die unless rescued and assisted. Discarded plastic bags in waterways are also very real hazards. Sometimes, fishers will leave a set line unattended and this too is a real danger.

Should you come across a pelican in need of rescue, please ring

0418 NATIVE (0418 628 483)



Tea Gardens Visitor Centre
245 Myall Street
02 4997 0111
www.teagardens.nsw.au
teagardensvic@gmail.com

Tea Gardens - Hawks Nest

OUR PELICANS

We are fortunate in having so many of these beautiful birds resident in and around our two towns and a stroll along Tea Gardens riverside and across the Singing Bridge will usually be rewarded with plentiful sightings.

