

Rare Animals of Louisiana

Brown Pelican

Pelecanus occidentalis

Rarity Rank: S2/G4

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------|-----------|---|------|---|--------|
| State | | | | | |
| Global | | | | | |
| | imperiled | | rare | | secure |



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Photo by Larry Korhnak

Identification:

- Large brown waterbird with long, flat bill and distendable gular (throat) pouch
- Adult body plumage is gray-brown to silver-brown; wing feathers darker
- Head and neck of non-breeding adults is white, whereas the hindneck and nape are cinnamon brown during the breeding season
- Bill gray to brown
- Immature generally brown with some pale mottling on wings and neck, underpart whitish
- In flight, neck is retracted heron-style
- Adults 107 to 137 cm long, wingspread to 2.4 m
- Usually found in small flocks, flying just above water surface and rarely soaring

Habitat:

- Usually occurs in bays, tidal estuaries or along the coast
- Nests commonly in shrub thickets within dunes of barrier islands
- Feeds in deep and shallow coastal waters

Food habits:

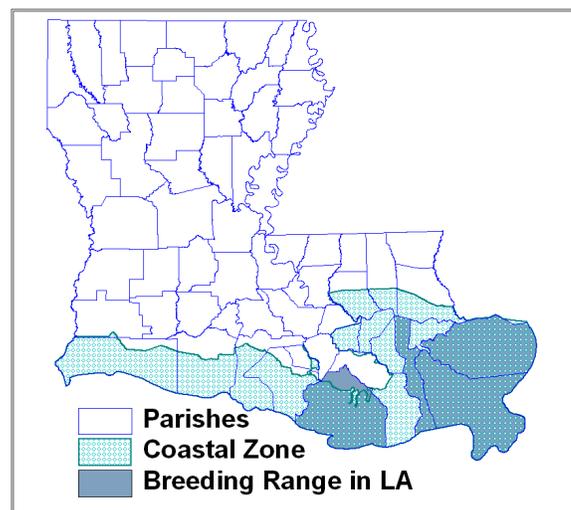
- Mainly fish and some marine invertebrates
- Captures prey by diving headfirst into water surface and trapping fish in the gular pouch

Range:

Nests in scattered coastal colonies from southern California to Chile and North Carolina to Venezuela

Reproduction:

- Lays clutch of 2 to 3 eggs between November and July in nest on ground or in low shrubs
- Renesting after failed nesting attempt is common
- Eggs are bright, chalky white and often streaked when first laid
- Both parents incubate and brood



Range based on occurrences in Natural Heritage database

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Threats:

- Severe pesticide poisoning from DDT in the 1960's led to complete destruction of Louisiana population from thinning of egg shells
- Decrease in nesting habitat due to erosion of barrier islands
- Illegal take of eggs for human consumption
- Coastal land loss

Beneficial Management Practices:

- Annual monitoring of nesting colonies
- Signing of nesting colonies and protection against disturbance by man, especially during nesting season
- Rebuilding of islands important to nesting

LA River Basins:

Pontchartrain, Mississippi, Barataria, Terrebonne



Clockwise from left:
Hatchling; Pelicans on North
Islands; Pelican Nests

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

References:

Shields, M. 2002. Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*). In The Birds of North America, No. 609 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

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For more information, please visit our Web pages at

<http://www.wlf.la.gov/wildlife/louisiana-natural-heritage-program> or call 225-765-2811
www.BTNEP.org or 1-800-259-0869