



Oregon Sea Grant Extension  
Sustainable Tourism &  
Outdoor Recreation Program

# Interpretative Fact Sheet

## Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)



The following short article is from the [Oregon Coast 101 Species](#) collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

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Tourism and Business Development College of Business,  
Oregon State University Extension - Oregon Sea Grant at  
<http://tourism.oregonstate.edu/>

Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional Program  
<https://www.GORPguide.org>

For more information about the GORP training program see:  
<https://www.gorpguide.org/become-a-gorp-certified-guide>

# Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

 [tourism.oregonstate.edu/brown-pelican-pelecanus-occidentalis/](https://tourism.oregonstate.edu/brown-pelican-pelecanus-occidentalis/)

By colliiek2

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**What flies with a large pouch and never has to go through airport security? A California Brown Pelican!**

The California Brown Pelican stops by for a couple of weeks each year in Bandon. One of the best places to watch these large birds as they plunge-dive for fish is on Jetty Road SW near the mouth of the Coquille River in Bandon, Oregon.



Pelicans form graceful V-shaped formations hunting for schools of fish.

## How big?

California Brown Pelicans are hard to miss with a wingspan of nearly 79-inches and a body length of 54-inches! Their size is further underscored when they fly in neat, V-shaped formations over the surf hunting for schools of fish.

## Diving

As they plunge into the water, their famed three-gallon throat pouch scoops up their prey. Only the California Brown and a closely related Peruvian species make these spectacular plunging sideline dives into the water. There are ten pelican species.

## Where to find them

Pelicans congregate in large numbers at the mouth of several Oregon bays during migration. You will often see them roosting on rocky formations, pilings or piers or hear their loud “screaming” call.

They migrate to/from winter breeding grounds in southern California and Mexico. They range from Vancouver Island, Canada to northern South America. Approximately 20,000 pelicans living on the Oregon coast in the summer.

## Caution!

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They can also be comical panhandlers and may beg from humans. They often hang out looking for opportunistic snacks such as fish scraps, crustaceans, lizards, smaller birds or eggs, turtles, etc. U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife has warned the public to:

- Not feed the birds (human foods can injure or lead to starvation),
- Leave the birds alone (if they are hanging out here, they are not breeding), and
- Avoid attempting to pet them or interact with them (***no selfies please!***).

## Recovery

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These magnificent dare devils were recently removed from the endangered list in December (2019). They are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is illegal to capture, kill, or possess a California Brown Pelican. Each violation comes with a maximum punishment of \$15,000 in fines and six months in jail.

**For more information** check: US Dept. of Fish & Wildlife Bandon Marsh site at [https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Bandon\\_Marsh/wildlife\\_and\\_habitat/waterfowl.html](https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Bandon_Marsh/wildlife_and_habitat/waterfowl.html)

### REFERENCES:

- Oregon Dept. of Fish & Wildlife ***Pelicans and Cormorants*** at <https://myodfw.com/wildlife-viewing/species/pelicans-and-cormorants> (there is a link so you can hear their calls near the bottom of the page).
- Brown pelicans lingering on Oregon Coast*** see: [https://www.oregonlive.com/news/2010/01/brown\\_pelicans\\_overstaying\\_the.html](https://www.oregonlive.com/news/2010/01/brown_pelicans_overstaying_the.html)