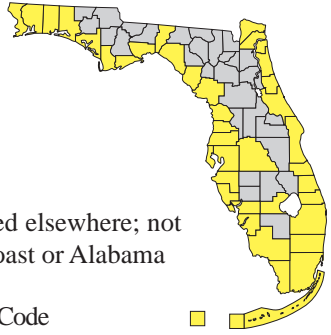


## BROWN PELICAN

*Pelecanus occidentalis*

- Order:** Pelecaniformes  
**Family:** Pelecanidae  
**FNAI Ranks:** G4/S3  
**U.S. Status:** None in Florida; Endangered elsewhere; not listed along U.S. Atlantic coast or Alabama  
**FL Status:** Species of Special Concern

U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs. Many seabird colonies are fenced and posted during breeding season; some of most important are state-designated as Critical Wildlife Areas.



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**Description:** Large, heavy waterbird with a massive bill and huge throat pouch. Wings and body mostly grayish brown. Nonbreeding adults have whitish head and neck, often washed with yellow; in breeding adults, hindneck becomes a dark chestnut color. Head and neck of immature is grayish brown and underparts whitish. Beautiful gliding flight low over water, often in lines; also soars high overhead, circling on thermal drafts.

**Similar Species:** Differs from American white pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) in being mainly grayish brown overall instead of white.

**Habitat:** Mainly coastal, feeding in shallow estuarine waters, and (less often) far offshore. Makes extensive use of sand spits, sand bars, and islets for nocturnal roosting and daily loafing. Nests principally on small islands in bays and estuaries, in small bushes or trees, or on ground. Mangrove islands are used frequently for roosting and nesting in central and southern Florida.

## BROWN PELICAN

## *Pelecanus occidentalis*

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Resident along both coasts, although less common in panhandle, especially in winter. A portion of the eastern subspecies migrates to Florida, increasing numbers in fall and winter. Breeding season varies and may begin in fall in southern Florida and late winter or spring farther north.

**Florida Distribution:** Occurs all along both coasts and breeds along Gulf coast, mainly from Levy County south to the Keys, and north to Volusia County on the Atlantic coast. Also nests at a few sites in the panhandle (Gulf, Franklin, Wakulla counties). Increasingly observed inland in central Florida; one record of inland breeding at Lake Okeechobee.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Ranges from British Columbia on the Pacific coast south to southern South America, and on Atlantic from Maryland, through the West Indies and coasts of Mexico and Central America to northern South America. On the Pacific coast breeding range is from southern California to central Chile. Breeds locally within the eastern range.

**Conservation Status:** Populations (especially in California, Texas, and Louisiana) decimated in U.S. by DDT and related pesticides in 1950s and 60s. Population numbers are up from mid 1970s but are subject to unexplained fluctuations. Over past 30 years population estimates for Florida have ranged from 6,000 – 8,000 pairs in the 1970s to a high of 12,310 pairs in 1989. Most increases seen from 1977 to 1989 took place in northern half of state. During this time, several important populations declined (e.g., south of Tampa Bay, through Keys, and Florida Bay), partly attributable to a food shortage. Breeding population estimate for 1995 was 9,950 pairs. Other threats include disturbance by humans, increased turbidity (e.g., from dredging), oil and other chemical spills, freezing weather, and entanglement in fishing gear. Many known breeding sites occur on public and private conservation lands, and some are designated as Critical Wildlife Areas.

**Protection and Management:** Protect breeding and foraging areas from pollution and human disturbance. Educate fishermen and recreational boaters, along with increased surveillance in some areas. Designation of important nesting and foraging areas as Critical Wildlife Areas may also be warranted.

**Selected References:** Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Runde et al. 1991, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.