

Pelicans in the Bay



The sight of a pelican gracefully gliding along the waters of Biscayne Bay is a beautiful picture to see. Brown pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) are found within the Gulf of Mexico from Texas through Florida, including parts of the Atlantic and Pacific coastal areas. The life span of a pelican may reach up to 30 years old or more, but in the wild only 10% of all pelicans reach age 10. They weigh between 6 and 8 pounds. Pelicans like to eat four pounds of fish per day. Their bill can hold more fish at one time than their belly. Their wing span extends up to six or seven-feet from tip to tip, and they can fly at speeds up to 35 miles per hour.

In Florida, pelican nests can be spotted in mangrove trees. Nests are made by the females and constructed out of branches and grasses. After the breeding season, late Fall to early Winter, the females lay between 2 to 4 eggs and are incubated for 30 days. At 11 or 12 weeks later, the pelicans are full grown and able to fly. At 2 ½ to 3 years of age the pelicans are sexually mature. Immature pelicans can be physically distinguished from mature pelicans. The younger ones are brown with a white belly and mature pelicans have a blackish belly with a silver back. Adults have a white head and reddish brown neck during the summer and a yellow head and white neck during the winter. Yellow head is a sign of mating plumage.

