

# Species Fact Sheets

**Order:** Pelicaniformes  
**Scientific Name:** *Pelecanus rufescens*

**Family:** Pelicanidae  
**Common Name:** Pink-backed Pelican

**AZA Management:**  Green  Yellow  Red  None



**NATURAL HISTORY:**

**Geographic Range:** Europe  Asia  North America  Neotropical   
 Africa  Australia  Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Habitat:** Forest  Desert  Grassland  Coastal   
 Riverine  Montane  Other Rivers, lakes, estuaries

**Circadian Cycle:** Diurnal  Crepuscular  Nocturnal  Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

To 70° F  To 60° F  To 50° F  To 40° F

**Cold Tolerance:** To 30° F  To 20° F  Other

This species is more susceptible to frostbite than the larger species of pelicans. They can withstand freezing temps for very short periods of times, provided a large open water source is available. Indoor winter housing is recommended for all but the southernmost states.

To 30° F  To 50° F  To 70° F  To 90° F

**Heat Tolerance:** To 110° F  Other

Access to shade and water source for swimming is recommended. When temperature approach 90° or above, gular fluttering, as a means of thermoregulations, is a common behavior for this species.

**Diet:** Frugivore  Carnivore  Piscivore  Insectivore   
 Nectivore  Omnivore  Folivore  Other (Add Below)

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## Captive Dietary Needs:

Feed whole, previously frozen fish supplemented with vitamin E/Thiamine paste (1 gram – 100 IU/50 MG). Given the perishable nature of fish, appropriate fish-handling techniques are crucial to maintain the nutritive quality of the food. Feeding more than one species of fish is recommended. Not only does this add to the nutritional diversity of their diet, it is also beneficial when there is fluctuations in fish availability. When preferred fish are not available Pink-backs can be reluctant to accept unfamiliar food items. In open air exhibits fish should be hand tossed to individual birds. This will greatly reduce the loss of diet to native wildlife and ensures each pelican receives its allotted dose of supplemental vitamins. Feedings should take place 2-3 times a day. Increase to 4 times per day when nesting. Pelicans share nesting duties and the additional feeding ensure both parents have ample opportunity to eat. The birds should be hand fed until they become satiated and disinterested in the hand feeding process Here is a sample diet: Smelt –Lake 540 g, Trout 4" 300 g, Finger Mullet 150 g, Vitamin E/Thiamin Paste (100 IU/50 mg) 1 g inserted in whole fish.

**Life Expectancy in the Wild:** Males: Unknown: 40 + years Females: Unknown; 40 +years

**Life Expectancy in Captivity:** Males: Unknown: 40 + years Females: Unknown; 40 +years

## BREEDING INFORMATION:

**Age at Sexual Maturity:** Males: 3-4 years Females: 3-4 years

**Courtship Displays:** Courtship involves pointing it bill upward and bill clapping. Cooperative nest building is also an important courtship activity, strengthening the temporary pair bond.

**Nest Site Description:** This colonial nesting species prefers to nest in treetops along waterfronts, also sandy islands, mangroves and even close to civilization; trees may be killed by repeated nesting. In captivity they will readily nest on the ground, preferring open areas near their pool. A crisscross of logs or other artificial structure can be provided as a foundation for building their nest upon. At the first sign of courtship behaviors nesting material in the form of sticks should be provided. Remnant hoof stock browse, cut down to lengths under 2', works well for this. At minimum, provide each breeding pair a 20 gallon bin full of nesting material. Inadequate amounts of nesting material will result in poorly built nest and resource aggression resulting from the theft of nesting material. Ultimately, this will result in a high level of egg mortality.

**Clutch Size, Egg Description:** 2-3 eggs, 3 is typical. Oblong and chalky white.

**Incubation Period:** 31-34 days, 32 typical

**Fledgling Period:** 70-85 days. In captivity chicks typically enter their pool at 55 days old.

**Parental Care:** Both males and female's share nest building, incubation and chick rearing duties.

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**Chick Development:** Eggs hatch asynchronously. In the wild, only one chick typically survives. In captivity rearing 2 or more chicks per clutch is not uncommon and can be attributed to food availability.

## CAPTIVE HABITAT INFORMATION:

**Social Structure in the Wild:** Gregarious nesters, forming temporary pair bonds during the nesting season. They feed in solitary or in small loose flocks.

**Social Structure in Captivity:** Gregarious. Birds housed in small flocks (<4) tend to be far more nervous than individuals housed in larger groups.

**Minimum Group Size:** 2.2

**Maximum Group Size:** 10.10

**Compatible in Mixed Species Exhibits:** Yes

**Comments:**

They can be housed with medium – large waterfowl, wading birds and other pelican species. They can also be housed with hoof stock and even hippos. It is recommended that an area of refuge, excluding access of the large mammals is provided.

**Optimal Habitat Size:** Large pool or natural water source with an island or shoreline with adequate perching.

**Management Challenges:** Pododermatitis (bumblefoot). This can be reduced by providing various diameter branches and logs for perching. Aspergillosis, especially when housed inside for the winter months. Food loss and egg/chick predation from native birds (herons, egrets, vultures). This can be greatly reduced through responsible feeding practices, E.g. selective hand tossing of food or shifting birds into an enclosed feeding space.

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

[Click here to enter text.](#)

## REFERENCES:

Del Hoyo J., Elliot A., & Sargatal J. eds (1994). Handbook of the Birds of the World – Vol 1. Ostrich to Ducks. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.

McClements R., Chrissey S., (2002) Pelican and Cormorant Husbandry Manual; Nutrition Chapter

Brouwer K., Hiddinga B., King C., (1994) International Zoo Year Book vol. 33; Management and Breeding of Pelicans in Captivity

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