

Brown Pelican: *Pelecanus occidentalis*



The Brown Pelican was designated the state bird of Louisiana in 1966 and appears on both the state flag and state seal, which is why Louisiana is often referred to as “The Pelican State.”

There are seven species of pelicans, but the Brown Pelican is the smallest species measuring 42-54 in. long, weighing as much as 12 lbs., with a wingspan of up to 8 ft. The only dark pelican, it is also the only one to plunge into the water to catch its food.

It can be found along the ocean shores, bays and of course, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin. Groups of Brown Pelicans can be seen flying low over the water’s surface in single file. They nest in colonies on the ground on an island or in a bulky stick nest in a low tree.

The use of the pesticide DDT caused pelicans’ nesting attempts to fail and population decline along the Louisiana coast in 1961, and it is thought that the species completely disappeared by 1966. However, Louisiana repopulated its coastline by transporting fledglings from Florida. By 1995, the Federal Government declared the Brown Pelican “recovered,” with about 40,000 Brown Pelicans calling “The Pelican State” their home today.