



**The American White Pelican has a larger wingspan than our Brown Pelican**



**Why do white pelicans and other species like the White Ibis have black primary and secondary flight feathers?**

## **Brunswick Wildlife Our Other Pelican**

Be on the lookout for one of America's largest birds! Though American White Pelicans are rare in the Lower Cape Fear, they may be found sporadically during migration and winter. They breed in the interior of North America but overwinter in numbers on the coast from California to Florida and Georgia and down into Central America.

I photographed three white pelicans flying over Southport in late October of 2005. Unfortunately, by the time I stopped the truck and grabbed the camera, my photo ops turned into "butt shots". The above photos were taken this January at Pea Island NWR which, in my recent experience, has been a reliable overwintering site to find them.

This species is easily identified given the large white body, yellow bill and pouch, and the black trailing edge of their wings which is comprised of black primary and secondary flight feathers. Like Brown Pelicans, their flight is graceful and they are gregarious and may soar together in large flocks.

Then there is the size thing. White pelicans may weigh as much as twenty pounds, with wingspans exceeding nine feet. Comparatively, Brown Pelicans may weigh only half as much, with wingspans thirty inches shorter.

The most conspicuous behavioral difference between the two species concerns foraging strategies. American White Pelicans forage by submerging their bills and scooping up prey fish. They do not dive from the surface or plunge-dive from the air as Brown Pelicans do.

Also, they forage cooperatively much of the time, working in flocks to encircle and drive fish into shallow water. This concentrates the fish so that they may be scooped up much more efficiently. I have been fortunate to watch this behavior on the Florida gulf coast in winter and on the Snake River in Grand Teton in summer.

I'll leave you with an extra credit question for homework: "Why do white pelicans and other species like the White Ibis have black flight feathers?" Not to worry...no pop quiz and answers need not be handed in...just a little extra fun and a great trivia question.

John Ennis