

## FIRST RECORDS OF BROWN PELICAN IN THE INTERIOR OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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The Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) is a large aquatic bird primarily associated with saltwater habitats throughout the year. In western North America, the species nests only in California, but during the non-breeding season birds regularly wander north to coastal Oregon, Washington, and southern British Columbia (Shields 2002). Prior to 2007, there were no confirmed reports of this species in the British Columbia interior (Godfrey 1986, Campbell et al. 1990, R.W. Campbell pers. comm.).

On 8 July 2007, I saw a bird that I believed could be a Brown Pelican at Kokanee Creek Park, approximately 20 km northeast of Nelson, British Columbia. The bird was flapping low over the surface of the West Arm of Kootenay Lake, heading toward Balfour. Because it was angling almost directly away from me, I could not see its head well enough to confirm it was a pelican. However, I could think of no other species that would fit its size, colour, and behaviour. The park was busy with campers and beach-goers and it appeared to me that the bird must have flown directly over the beach. In fact, my 11-year-old daughter, Bethany, who was further along the shore from me, saw the bird and overheard someone exclaim, “Did you see that pelican?”

Knowing how unusual this sighting was and not having obtained a satisfactory look at the bird myself, I was reluctant to report it as a Brown Pelican. However, that evening, I mentioned the

possibility of a Brown Pelican present in the area on the Yahoo Groups listserv “wkbirds”. I was surprised the following day to find a response from Ursula and Terry Lowrey, who saw the Brown Pelican that morning as it flew past Kokanee Creek Park in the opposite direction than I had observed the previous day.

Over the next couple of days there were no sightings, but considerable discussion, speculation and excitement were apparent. Better evidence was still needed in order to confirm this record as the first for the British Columbia interior. Then, on 11 July, Holley Rubinsky posted photos taken that day of a Brown Pelican at Kaslo on the North Arm of Kootenay Lake, approximately 50 km northeast of Kokanee Creek Park. The bird had been reported to Dirk Pidcock by local resident Beatrice Massara. Beatrice reported the bird was first observed flying with Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*), then sitting on the shore, appearing rock-like. Dirk and Holley searched the area, unsuccessfully at first, but Holley later rediscovered the bird, an immature, on a raft in Kaslo Bay (Figure 1).

The pelican was observed in the Kaslo area several times and by various people over the following week. The last recorded observation was by an angler on 19 July, who provided an intriguing report that the bird appeared to be feeding among a large school of Kokanee (*Oncorhynchus nerka*) fry at the mouth of the bay. Attempts to relocate the bird



**Figure 1.** An immature Brown Pelican at Kaslo Bay, the first record for the interior of British Columbia. 11 July 2007 (Holley Rubinsky). BC Photo 3605a.

on 20 July were not successful.

The second occurrence of Brown Pelican in the British Columbia interior came from the Okanagan valley (Figure 2). Terry and Kent Macfarlane observed and photographed the bird at Killiney Beach, on the west side of Okanagan Lake, near Vernon, on 5 September 2007. It was reported to Chris Charlesworth on 17 September, and Chris subsequently posted the sighting and photographs on “bcintbirds”. This bird was also an immature, leading many to ask whether the two were the same individual. It seems entirely possible, and perhaps even likely, that they were.

Inland reports of this species in western North America north of California are rare. Neither Alberta nor Montana have records of Brown Pelican (Alberta Bird Record Committee 2007, Montana Audubon 2007). Idaho has single reports from 1974, 1979, and 1981 (Idaho Bird Records Committee 2007b) and the species is listed in some references as having occurred in Idaho (e.g., Shields 2002); however, none of the three records have been accepted for inclusion in the state list issued by the Idaho Bird Records Committee (2007a, 2007b). While Brown Pelicans have been reported infrequently in interior fresh-water locations, including lakes and rivers, in Washington and Oregon west of the Cascade Mountains (see Wahl et al. 2005, Marshall et al. 2006) there are only three records from far inland



**Figure 2.** An immature Brown Pelican, the first occurrence for the Okanagan valley, may have been the same individual that was observed in Kaslo earlier in the summer. 5 September 2007 (Terry and Kent Macfarlane). BC Photo 3606a.

locations. These are: along the Columbia River on the Washington/Oregon border on 19 October 1997 (Sullivan 1998), Deschutes County, Oregon and surrounding areas in August and September 2005 (S. G. Mlodinow pers. comm.), and Walla Walla County, Washington in September 2006 (S. G. Mlodinow pers. comm.). Surprisingly, Bent (1922) describes the Brown Pelican as occurring north to central British Columbia (“Chilcotin District”), but I could find no records to support this claim.

### **Acknowledgments**

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### ***About the Author***

Janice lives in Nelson with her husband and two children. One of her interests is tracking the migration of waterbirds along the West Arm of Kootenay Lake. While finding a rarity provides special excitement for any birder, Janice also enjoys discovering patterns in the movements of common species.

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