

## **Brown Pelicans**

Brown Pelicans are a regular visitor to the Pacific Northwest. When standing on the shore with their large bodies and oversized bill, these cumbersome looking birds have an ungainly appearance that belies their grace and power in flight. A squadron of pelicans flying low over the ocean is one of the most awe-inspiring exhibitions in the flying world.

How these mighty flyers catch fish is a testament to the efficiency of their build and a lesson in grace and power. Brown Pelicans have perfected the art of plunge diving for food. Their massive bodies are built for a marine environment and the large bill is integral for catching fish. Brown Pelicans can see the fish below the surface and can correct for the refraction of light through the water, which seemingly shifts the location of their prey. While diving, they pull their head back, push their feet forward, bend their wings while achieving speeds of over 40 mph. Specialized, nictitating membranes protect their eyes as they dive into the water.

When they hit the water, they thrust their wings and legs backward, which shoots their bill towards the fish even faster. At this point the giant throat pouch rapidly fills with up to 2.5 gallons of water. The fish gets trapped inside as the pelican closes its mouth. It then raises its head while pressing the pouch against its breast to drain the water. The whole process takes less than 20 seconds. Talk about fast food!