

GENERAL NOTES

White Pelican numbers in Everglades National Park. — The winter range of the White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) includes the coasts of Florida through Mexico (Palmer 1962). The substantial numbers found in some areas of south Florida have long been known (May 1935). White Pelicans are locally common in and near Everglades National Park where airplane surveys, conducted as part of the Coot Bay Christmas Bird Count, have found from 1000 to 4600 birds over the past decade. Although this survey provides a nearly complete census of pelicans in the count area, year to year differences do not necessarily reflect trends in pelican numbers because of the small area covered and because weather and the extent of the seasonal dry period determine whether pelicans happen to be feeding or loafing in the count area on the day of the count.

To evaluate the importance of estuaries in and near Everglades National Park to White Pelicans, I undertook three aerial censuses during the spring (9 April), summer (22 July), and winter (13 December) of 1976. The censuses covered all marine and brackish water habitats from Everglades City on the Gulf of Mexico to Cutler on Biscayne Bay, including south Biscayne Bay, Card Sound, Barnes Sound and Florida Bay south to the Lower Arsnicker Keys. Most of the habitat covered is in Everglades National Park and Biscayne National Monument.

Although White Pelicans are most numerous in winter, some remain in south Florida during spring and summer. I found 46 pelicans in April and 43 in July 1976. Apparently the number of summering birds varies from year to year with several hundred being reported in some summers (Robertson 1962).

The arrival of wintering pelicans in October coincides with the beginning of the dry season. They first frequent the Gulf Coast and when this region becomes too dry for feeding, they move to Cape Sable and Florida Bay. In spring many feed inland in streams and ponds of the Everglades where fish become concentrated as the marshes dry.

In December 1976, I found 5240 White Pelicans in and near Everglades National Park. Most (70%) were on Cape Sable and 27% were in Florida Bay. The rest were scattered along the Gulf Coast and Biscayne Bay. This population can be compared to that of 20 years before, when William B. Robertson, Jr. estimated that 5000 or more pelicans wintered in Everglades National Park (Stevenson 1957). This comparison suggests that there may have been no marked change in the wintering population over the past 20 years.

Analysis of pelican band recoveries, provided by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Bird Banding Laboratory, indicates that pelicans wintering in Florida include those from Saskatchewan, Montana, Ontario, North Dakota and South Dakota. It has been suggested that pelicans wintering in south Florida may represent a significant proportion of those breeding east of the continental divide (Robertson and Kushlan 1974). Current estimates put the White Pelican nesting population of Montana, and South and North Dakota at about 17,000 (Sloan 1973). Thus it is possible that the bays, estuaries and marshes of extreme southern Florida in and near Everglades National Park may be important to the survival of some segments of the American White Pelican population.

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