

3-91-7

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13 August 1991

Colorado Records Committee
c/o Zoological Collections
Denver Museum of Natural History
City Park, Denver, CO 80205

Chairman,

Enclosed is a report and photographs of a Brown Pelican observed at Antero Reservoir on 1 July 1991. I had heard about this species being seen at Chatfield Reservoir prior to my observation and another report from Barr Lake about the same time as my observation. Would you please provide some feedback concerning the other records such as plumage and number seen. I am very interested as to why these birds staged a "mini-invasion" into Colorado this summer. If I was to predict the plumage of a Brown Pelican in Colorado, I would have guessed juvenile or first year immature. The individual I observed was in an "adult"-type plumage, termed Post Chick feeding by National Geographic Guide. I am interested in the other individuals observed this summer.

The slides included with the report are duplicates. If the original slides are needed by the committee, see let me know and I will do what I can.

Enjoy the fall migration.

Laurens Halsey

Species: Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

Number Seen: One

Sex: Undetermined

Date: 1 July 1991

Time seen: 11:40-13:10

Duration of observation: About seventy minutes between first discovering the bird and when I left the location. Several minutes (up to ten total) the bird was not in sight due to observer setting up scope and camera, viewing other species or driving to better vantage points.

Other Observer: Louise Bator (same address) - novice birder but familiar with the species (and Am. White Pelicans) from the Texas coast.

Light conditions: Late morning/early afternoon sun, slightly behind observer throughout observation period but nearly overhead.

Distance from bird: Estimated, 150-500 meters.

Optical Equipment: 10x42 B&L Elites, 25x Bushnell Spotting Scope, photographed with Canon AE-1 mated to 600mm/F4.5 Canon lens (Kodachrome 200)

Photographs: Many photographs were taken of this bird. Duplicates of three will be submitted with this record and to regional editor of American Birds.

Habitat - general: mountain reservoir

- specific: large reservoir surrounded by short grass high altitude prairie, limited mudflats/sandbars, no trees bordering reservoir.

Behavior: First observed the bird sitting/swimming about 200 meters from nearest shore. There appeared to be no association between this bird and nearby American White Pelicans. The nearest White Pelican flushed from a small fishing boat while the Brown Pelican ignored both the boat and the White Pelicans. Later a fishing boat traveling at high speeds flushed the Brown Pelican. This bird flew and soared for several minutes (about 4 minutes) with other White Pelicans, California Gulls and Double-crested Cormorants. In flight, the Brown Pelican's wing strokes were strong and heavy. When soaring, this bird reached an estimated altitude above the water of 60-70 meters. The Brown Pelican landed on the water several hundred meters away from other birds and about 70 meters from the reservoir's dam. The bird appeared alert, but not searching for food in a manner typical of my observations of this species along coastal Texas. After about ten minutes (during which I had gotten both camera and scope setup), the Brown Pelican flew (not flushed) to the area where I first observed it. This time there were several Am. White Pelican very close by but the Brown Pelican did not appear to be associating with them. After several minutes, I observed the Brown Pelican

leap from the water, landing about 1-2 meters away. The landing appeared to be a shallow dive and the pelican appeared with a medium size fish. The fish was promptly swallowed. This feeding technique was similar to that of a White Pelican, but I have never before observed a Brown Pelican perform it. This technique may be what is described as "dip bill" in Harrison's Seabirds. The Brown Pelican remained in the general vicinity for several more minutes before flying off to another section of the reservoir, very close to the boat landing (southeast corner). The bird moved around to several portions of the reservoir, staying at each location generally around five minutes. Eventually the Brown Pelican landed near a small island on the south side of the reservoir in shallow water. The bird preened while standing in the shallow water and then moved onto the shore of the island. There were several other birds at this part of the island, White Pelican (2), Double-crested Cormorant (4) and several Great Blue Heron. My last observation of the Brown Pelican was of it standing on the beach on the island with the White Pelicans (other species flushed as I approached to take my final pictures).

Detailed Description:

SHAPE/SIZE: Shape and size distinctive, large bill with extended throat poach, large and broad wings and overall large size. Large bird but slightly smaller than American White Pelicans (observed in close proximity). Shape and proportions very similar to Am. White Pelicans.

PLUMAGE: Adult or near adult plumage. I referenced NGS Guide while observing the bird hoping to be able to accurately age this bird. The figure titled "chick-feeding adult" opposite page 40 very closely matched the individual I observed. The forecrown, crown, face, feathered portions of the throat and sides of the neck were white with a slight yellowish tinge to the forecrown. The back of the head and neck were dark chestnut colored. The upper body and upper-wing coverts were brownish with white or gray tipped feathers. The upper surface of the flight feathers were dark brown, no flecking of whitish. Underparts were dark brown, belly appeared to be paler than rest of underparts.

SOFT PARTS: Upper mandible appeared grayish brown, lower mandible and poach appeared dark brown. Legs color not observed in field but appear dark in photographs.

Voice: None heard.

Similar Species: American White Pelican in shape and size only, plumage very distinctive of Brown Pelican. This bird was immediately identified as a Brown Pelican, though shocked as I was to find this species in the mountains of Colorado. I have much experience with this species in Texas and southern California (Salton Sea and San Diego) and Am. White Pelicans (in Colorado, Texas and California).

Reference Material: Referenced National Geographic "Field Guide to the BIRDS of North America" (1st edition) during the observation to determine age, and "SEABIRDS an Identification Guide" after the observation again to determine age of the bird.

Date of this report: 5 August 1991 20:15

Written notes recorded: Written notes recorded at the time observation included details of plumage, behavior section written from memory.

Comments: I had hoped to be able to age this bird better than I presently have, but my theory is that this was a near mature but a non-breeding bird. Unfortunately reference material available to myself does not describe the plumage of the individual that I observed any better than "chick-feeding adult". Obviously there were no chicks present. My guess is that this individual will reach full maturity the following spring (1992) and that this was an individual which was near but not at full maturity. I will take a closer interest at individual plumage characteristics of Brown Pelican along the Texas coast.

Signature: _____

Laurens R. Daesey

Date: 6 August 1991

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD ☒ ? UNUSUAL RECORD ☐

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Please print or type. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.

Species: BROWN PELICAN / Pelecanus occidentalis
(Vernacular Name) (Scientific Name)Date(s): July 9th, 1991 (Apparently there prior to sighting date).Number of birds seen: ONE Sex: ? Plumage: ADULTLatilong: 18 Distribution Code: Acc. Habitat Code: LLocality: ANTERO RESERVOIR Elevation: _____Nearest town: HARTSEL County: PARKTime(s) observed: TWO OR THREE SIGHTINGS FROM APPROX. 9:00 to 10:00 A.M.Duration of observation (e.g. 1 sec., 5 min., etc.): SEVERAL MINUTES EACH.

Other observers who saw the bird with you (give names, addresses, telephone numbers):

RON RYDER, FT. COLLINS, 303-491-6547.JIM DENNIS, FT. COLLINS, 303-484-2836 (Div. of Wildlife).

Other observers who saw the bird independently (give names, addresses, telephone numbers):

UNKNOWN.

Light conditions (position of bird to light and shade, direction and strength of light):

CLEAR DAY, GOOD LIGHT (See Photo).Optical equipment used (e.g. power, types): 7x35 + 8x40 BINOCULARS.Distance and how measured: 150-200' (est.)If photographed, type of equipment and film: MINOLTA SLR 35mm camera with 35-105 telephoto. ASA 200 Color slide film.

Who else photographed the bird: _____

Describe the bird's behavior (e.g. flying, feeding, or habits used in identifying):

Loafing on island, with white pelicans when first seen. Later seen on open water & in short flight - again with white pelicans.

Describe in detail the bird's relative size, overall shape, plumage and color pattern. Include details of bill, wing and tail shape. Give particular emphasis to marks you used to identify the bird. Reference to its resemblance to field guide descriptions and illustrations is not enough. Describe only what you actually observed in the field:

Typical dark & lighter brown color of brown pelican and white on head. (see photo).

Description (continued): _____

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery, (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration):

Describe the general and specific habitat in which you observed the bird:

Fairly large & shallow reservoir. Islands & shoreline
devoid of trees. Many Calif. gulls, white pelicans, & cormorants
present.

How did you eliminate similarly appearing species?

Difference between brown & white pelicans is obvious.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species?

List books, illustration, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) At time of observation: _____

b) After observation: _____

This report was written from reports made during _____, after observation ☒, from memory ☒ & photos.

Date and time report was written: July 31, 1991, 3:00 P.M.

Reporting observer: CHUCK LOEFFLER Signature: Chuck Loeffler

Address: 2126 N. Weber St., Colo. Springs, CO 80907

All reports will be maintained permanently at the address below:

Return to: CURATOR, DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS
DENVER MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
CITY PARK
DENVER, CO 80205