
**First record of Brown Pelican
Pelecanus occidentalis from the
Ecuadorian highlands**

In the strictly marine Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*, inland records are relatively rare events throughout most of the species' range^{4,5}. Outside equatorial latitudes such occurrences are often due to hurricanes^{1,7} and El Niño events^{2,8}. The species also disperses into estuaries, sometimes flies upriver³ and regularly crosses the Isthmus of Panama, following the Canal¹⁰. Here we report on the first record of Brown Pelican for the inter-Andean valley of the northern Ecuadorian highlands⁹. It also may represent the first-ever case of prolonged residency on an Andean lake (at least 161 days).

On 7 July 2009, between 13h30 and 14h30, we observed a single Brown Pelican at Laguna Yahuarcocha (00°22'N 78°06'W; 2,185 m), north-east of Ibarra and 140 km from the Pacific Ocean. We had visited this site five days previously when the bird was not present, meaning it must have arrived in the interim, during a period of stable weather. It was dull brown with some white on the head- and neck-sides, suggesting it was a subadult. Low-resolution photos are available on request. For extended periods the pelican swam with its lower mandible resting on its breast, but on c.5

occasions it plunge-dived for prey from c.10–15 m, at least once catching a large tilapiine cichlid (species unknown), an invasive fish, which has been deliberately released in recent years for sport fishing. Evidently, this food resource was sufficient to sustain the pelican for an extended period, as TMC & TSG observed it throughout the second half of 2009 (with the last sighting on 16 December). Because the pelican was fully feathered, very shy and took flight when a boat passed by at great distance, we conclude that it had not escaped from captivity.

The pelican probably followed the río Mira Valley, the shortest (≥ 150 km) and most favourable route from the Pacific to the inter-Andean valley north of Ibarra for soaring birds because the upper half of the valley is dry and sunny. It seems less likely that it crossed the c.3,000 m (and always cloud-covered) Cordillera de Toisán to the west, or that it arrived from the south after entering the inter-Andean valley via the río Guayllabamba drainage. Vagrant Brown Pelicans have been reported from the Colombian Andes⁸. These records confirm that the species can show up at unlikely sites and altitudes, and that such movements are not necessarily dictated by tropical storms or El Niño events.

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Olaf Jahn

Aves & Conservación (Corporación Ornitológica del Ecuador), Pasaje Joaquín Tinajero E3-05, Quito, Ecuador; and Alexander Koenig Research Institute and Zoological Museum, Ornithology, Research Group: Biology and Phylogeny of Tropical Birds, Adenauerallee 160, D-53113 Bonn, Germany. E-mails: O.Jahn@andinanet.net and carpodectes@yahoo.com.

Peter Cosgrove and Cameron Cosgrove

Coilindra House, High Street, Grantown on Spey, Moray PH26 3EN, Scotland. E-mail: pearl mussel@coilindra.freereserve.co.uk.

Tanya Mueses Cevallos and Tatiana Santander García

Aves & Conservación (Corporación Ornitológica del Ecuador), Pasaje Joaquín Tinajero E3-05, Quito, Ecuador. E-mails: tanya_6182@live.com.ar and tsantander@avesconservacion.org.

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