

THE AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*PELECANUS ERYTHORHYNCHOS*),
A WINTER RESIDENT IN CUBA

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Abstract.—We report for the first time a population of 400 American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) as winter residents in the Maspoton Lagoon in the South coast of Pinar del Rio Province, Cuba.

Key words: American White Pelican, Cuba, *Pelecanus erythrorhynchus*, winter resident

Resumen.—EL PELÍCANO BLANCO (*PELECANUS ERYTHORHYNCHOS*), UN RESIDENTE INVERNAL EN CUBA. Se registra por primera vez una población de 400 pelicanos blancos (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchus*) como residentes invernales en la laguna de Maspoton en la costa sur de Pinar del Rio, Cuba.

Palabras claves: Cuba, *Pelecanus erythrorhynchus*, Pelicano Blanco, residente invernal

THE AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) has been described by Raffaele *et al.* (1998) as a very rare non breeding resident on Cuba and Puerto Rico and a vagrant elsewhere in the west Indies. These authors reported a flock of eight birds in one occasion. On the other hand Bond (1993) mentioned that the bird is casual in the West Indies. Garrido and Kirkconnell (2000) considered the bird as a vagrant, and reported eight records for Cuba, one last century (1838) and six recent records in 1940, 1954, 1989, and 1997, usually in January, February, or April in the localities of Yumury in the North of Matanzas province and Zapata Swamp in the south of the same province. In the Handbook of the Birds of the World (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992) the West Indies are not included in the range for this bird, perhaps due to the few records reported for the region. Their normal winter distribution is along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts from USA to Costa Rica.

Early in the morning (6:00 – 9:00) of 27 March 2004, we visited the Maspoton lagoon, in the coastal wetlands south to Los Palacios Rice Paddies in the west of the country in Pinar del Río province, as part of a project to monitor the birds using both coastal wetlands and nearby rice culture in three Cuban provinces.

As we arrived at the lagoon we observed small groups of American White Pelicans (between 5-15 individuals) feeding together with other seabirds including Brown Pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) and Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*). A few min later more White Pelicans arrived to form a flock of at least 400 feeding in the lagoon.

After feeding the flock soared over the lagoon for about 2 hr; this behaviour has been described for other migrant birds just before the spring migration (Todd 1996).

Local guides Antonio Morejón and Javier Medina, who have fished regularly in the lagoon for many years, report that the species is common in these coastal wetlands during winter. They both confirmed that during the last 6 years the same population size had been using the lagoon during winter residency, from October to March.

Although Del Hoyo *et al.* (1992) pointed out that all migration occurs over land, thus avoiding long sea crossings, it is evident in this case that this statement is not valid. Undoubtedly the birds migrated to Cuba flying over the Florida Strait to winter in our coastal lagoons. The same authors stated that the species is very susceptible to disturbance by humans, so perhaps these remote and inaccessible areas provide them not only with a wide offer of feeding resources but with an optimal area for resting without disturbance during their winter residency in the largest island of the West Indies.

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