

Pelicans

General notes: East Africa is host to two of the world's eight pelican species. Both have different feeding strategies but rely on their huge bills, equipped with an expandable pouch, to catch fish. With their large, webbed feet, pelicans are great swimmers and you may notice that they sit high in the water for such bulky birds. This is because air sacs secreted under the skin help to maintain excellent buoyancy. Despite their great size pelicans are fantastic fliers and routinely commute over 100km in search of feeding grounds, sometimes soaring 2–3 km above the ground. Both species are colonial breeders and gatherings of the noisy, fluffy white young form substantial crèches at breeding sites. At Lake Naivasha, both species are threatened by excessive water abstraction and rising toxicity levels due to the ever-expanding horticultural industry.

Great White Pelican

175 cm | 70" (wingspan 290 cm | 115")

A huge, white waterbird with a bright yellow bill. Large flocks of this impressive bird gather in the Rift Valley, especially at Lake Nakuru where groups are very approachable as they loaf and preen along the water's edge. When feeding, groups gather in circles and plunge their mighty bills into the water in unison, creating quite a spectacle. Breeding birds develop a semi-erectile crest and the facial skin colour changes from the usual yellow to orange. The overall plumage of such birds turns quite peachy, so be careful not to confuse this species with the Pink-backed Pelican which, strangely, looks less pink than a breeding Great White! It only breeds on rocky islands on Lake Elementeita, but not every year. Young birds are able to fly after 3 months, when their plumage is still very brown, and may take 3 years to reach maturity.



The Great White Pelican is the national bird of Romania.