

# Ornithological Observations



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Ornithological Observations accepts papers containing faunistic information about birds. This includes descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and plumage. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, and any other interesting or relevant material.

**Editor: Arnold van der Westhuizen**

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## **GREAT WHITE PELICAN *PELECANUS ONOCROTALUS* IN THE FISH RIVER CANYON, NAMIBIA**

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## GREAT WHITE PELICAN *PELECANUS ONOCROTALUS* IN THE FISH RIVER CANYON, NAMIBIA

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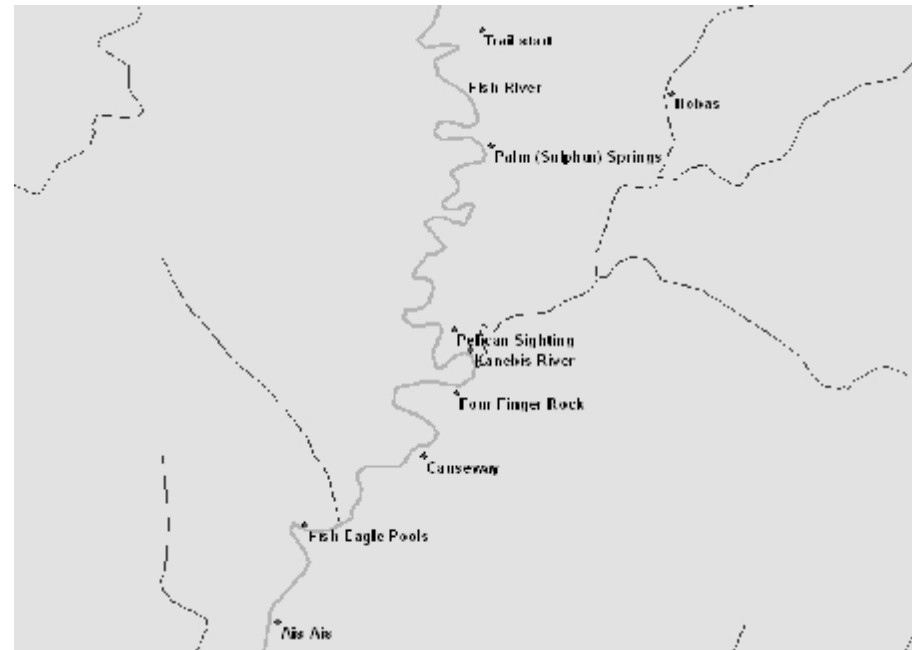
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One sighting of an adult Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* was recorded in the Fish River at approximately 27°45'17.52992"S, 17°35'26.1402"E, within the Fish River Canyon National Park, Namibia (Fig. 1). The pelican was seen at 09:30 on the morning of 18 August 2010. It was settled on a large stagnant pool in the river approximately 27km directly north of the Ais-Ais Rest Camp, and upstream from the confluence with the Kanebis River.

The climate is harsh at this time of the year, with maximum temperatures around 30°C, very low humidity and the river not flowing. As we approached the lone pelican, it twice attempted to fly away without success. It then swam right past us to the centre of the pool. Apart from a transverse cut across the middle of the upper mandible, and its apparent feebleness, the bird otherwise appeared unhurt. The cause of the injury is unknown but might be from collision with overhead wires. We continued with the hike soon after the encounter, with the bird still floating in the pool. This was the only sighting of a pelican during the approximately 85 km, five-day hike along the bottom of the canyon from a point approximately 12 km west of Hobas in the north to Ais-Ais in the south (Fig. 1), mostly within sight of the river course.

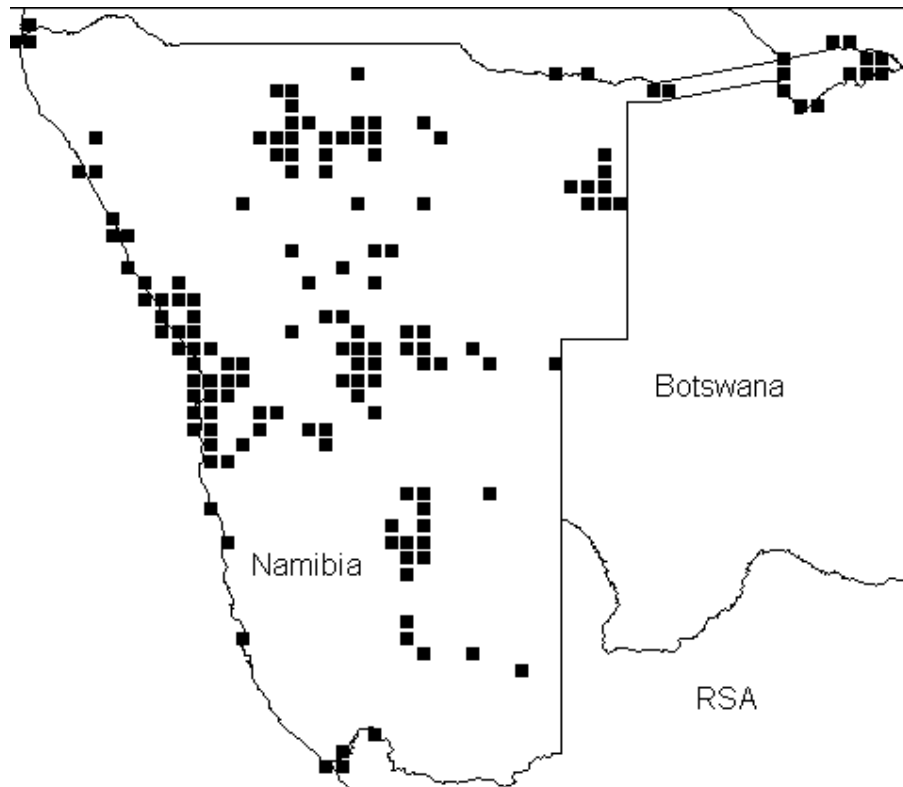
Usually gregarious, resident, but subject to irregular movements and dispersal, most *P. onocrotalus* remain within 200-300 km of their breeding sites, although they may wander occasionally more widely, usually in groups (Crawford 2005).



**Figure 1** - Sighting location of the Great White Pelican on 18 August 2010 in the Fish River Canyon National Park, Namibia.

The closest inland breeding (occasional) site to the sighting is the Hardap Dam 450 km further upstream in the Fish River. From the known distribution of *P. onocrotalus* taken from the South African Bird Atlas Project (Harrison *et al.* 1997) and presented in Fig. 2, Walvis Bay is the closest coastal breeding locality in Namibia, while estuaries in the Orange River also attract wanderers (Berruti 1989).

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**Figure 2** - Distribution map of the Great White Pelican in Namibia (taken from Harrison et al. 1997).

### Acknowledgements

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trail where this observation was recorded. G van der Merwe and WA Bester provided transport to/from Hobas and Ais-Ais, and the trip was partly financed out of a UP Research Grant to MNB.

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