

### 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<sup>4,5</sup>. Outside equatorial latitudes such occurrences are often due to hurricanes<sup>1,7</sup> and El Niño events<sup>2,8</sup>. The species also disperses into estuaries, sometimes flies upriver<sup>3</sup> and regularly crosses the Isthmus of Panama, following the Canal<sup>10</sup>. Here we report on the first record of Brown Pelican for the inter-Andean valley of the northern Ecuadorian highlands<sup>9</sup>. 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 ( $\geq 150$  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 Andes<sup>6</sup>. 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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