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Nesting of Brown Pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) on the Dry Tortugas, Florida

On 14 June 1974 on Bush Key, Dry Tortugas, Florida, T. Below and C. Winegarner found 5 Brown Pelican nests about 12 feet above ground in the White Mangroves (*Laguncularia racemosa*) along the north shore. Nineteenth-century records of pelicans breeding on the Dry Tortugas are ambiguous: Holder (1874: 390), in 1859, reported at least one nest with 2 chicks; Bryant (1859: 19) definitely states that he found a few pairs breeding, but the exact dates of his visit are unknown; Scott (1890: 307) found pelicans present but not nesting in March and April, 1890: and Bartsch (1919) made no reference to Brown Pelicans nesting on the Tortugas. Howell (1932: 84), possibly referring to the observations of Holder and Bryant, states that Brown Pelicans "formerly bred . . . on the Tortugas (1860)." It thus appears that a few pairs did breed on the Tortugas in the mid-1800's, but by late in the century none did so. Our record is the first reported nesting of this species in the 20th century on these ornithologically well-known islands (Robertson and Mason, 1965).

Three of the nests found in 1974 contained 2 eggs each, one nest was empty, and the fifth was not checked. On 19 June Schreiber and G.E. Woolfenden found one nest with 3 eggs and 4 nests with 2 eggs each. The empty nest of 14 June now contained 2 eggs. All nests survived a severe wind and rainstorm of 24-28 June. On 28 August, Below banded 7 nestlings from the 5 nests. Based on bill and wing lengths, plumage development, and weights, we estimate these nestlings were all between 6 and 7 weeks old, and their vigorous condition would suggest they all fledged (Schreiber, ms.). If the Tortugas nesting followed the typical chronology of Brown Pelican nesting, construction began in early June and all eggs were laid between 8 and 19 June. Mid-June is a late laying time for pelicans in

Florida (Schreiber, ms.), and especially for the Keys where most nesting occurs in late winter and early spring. Nine of the birds that nested on the Tortugas in June had dark eyes, bluish eye rings, mottled brown necks, and white heads. These plumage and soft-part features are typical of adults when they are feeding nestlings (Schreiber, unpubl. data). The tenth nesting pelican had the rufous-speckled head and primarily white belly of a subadult Brown Pelican (Schreiber, unpubl. data; Williams and Joanen, 1974). We suggest that the Tortugas nestings of Brown Pelicans were re-nesting attempts; probably the adults failed elsewhere. On 21-23 October 1974, J. Kushlan (pers. comm.) observed 5 banded birds-of-the-year on the Tortugas, undoubtedly young that fledged there.

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