

Black Bear charges at American White Pelicans

By Misty Goodman



Figure 1. A group of American White Pelicans was charged by a Black Bear on 25 July 2010 on Lake Nipigon.

Photo by Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.



While conducting a fisheries index netting program, on 25 July 2010, on Lake Nipigon in Northwestern Ontario, I was fortunate to witness an interesting event. American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) (Figure 1) are quite numerous in this area. A flock of about 30 birds was regularly observed from our boat during our week-long netting survey. Pelicans sometimes hunt communally for prey, which consists mostly of amphibians and fish. One evening, after having their fill of fish, the pelicans settled onto the shoreline. Shortly after, I saw a lone black bear (*Ursus americanus*) come out from the trees and wander along the shoreline, not far from the birds. Once the bear noticed the flock, it made a beeline directly for them. The bear quickly spooked the group of about 15 birds, who quickly retreated into deeper water, while the charging bear plunged a short distance into the water after them! It then made another charge at a second group of pelicans who were settled a little further along the shore. This group of birds also dispersed quickly.

The bear then returned to the shore and hung around for a few moments, as if waiting for another group to materialize. When that did not happen, it continued ambling along its way. I have worked on Lake Nipigon for the past nine years, but this is the first time I have encountered a bear apparently attempting to catch a pelican. Black bears will eat carrion, insects, fish, and they are also opportunistic predators, but the bulk of their diet is plant material.

In Ontario, breeding American White Pelicans are found only in four places: Lake Nipigon, Lake of the Woods Provincial Park, James Bay and in the Thunder Bay District on Lake Superior. The number of breeding pairs of American White Pelicans in the Lake Nipigon and Lake of the Woods areas has increased over the last 15 years. Nevertheless, they are still vulnerable to threats from high water levels, disturbance of nesting sites by recreational boaters, and disease. The American White Pelican is listed as threatened under Ontario's *Endangered Species Act*, 2007, which protects the species and its habitat.

Misty Goodman, Fisheries Technician
Lake Nipigon Fisheries Assessment Unit, OMNR Northwest Science and Information 5 Wadsworth Drive, Nipigon, ON.
E-mail: goodmanmisty@hotmail.com