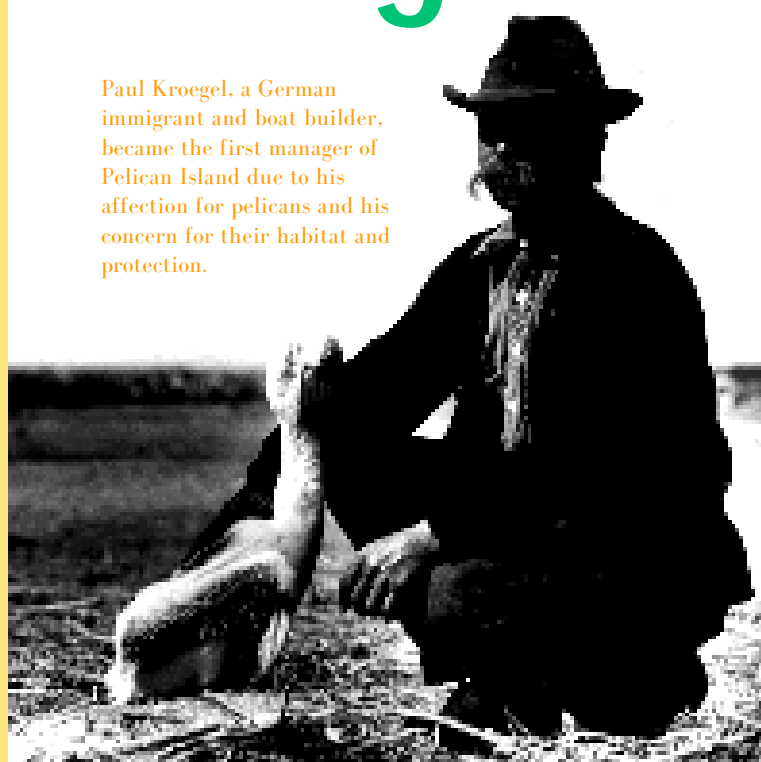


Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge

Paul Kroegel, a German immigrant and boat builder, became the first manager of Pelican Island due to his affection for pelicans and his concern for their habitat and protection.



AMERICA'S FIRST

History

Pelican Island has long been home to many kinds of birds. In 1859, Dr. Henry Bryant reported seeing thousands of herons, egrets, pelicans, ibises, and spoonbills, all nesting in harmony among the tree tops of black and red mangroves. However, plume hunters had already arrived to begin their relentless slaughter of countless egrets, herons, spoonbills, and even pelicans. The annihilation was so complete that by 1903 only brown pelicans were left. And Pelican Island was the last home for brown pelicans along the entire east coast of Florida.

The pelicans might not be here today if it wasn't for a man by the name of Paul Kroegel. Kroegel was a German immigrant who homesteaded in Sebastian with his father and brother. They settled at Barker's Bluff in Sebastian, partly because of the proximity to Pelican Island.

Paul Kroegel took a special interest in the pelicans as he watched them from his home. Paul initiated a campaign to protect the birds at Pelican Island and invited influential visitors to go with him and witness the carnage. When well known naturalists like Dr. Frank Chapman arrived in the area, Ma Latham, who ran the nearby Oak Lodge opposite of Mico, sent word to Kroegel. Kroegel successfully enlisted their support.

In 1901, a State law was passed to protect all non-game



birds and Paul Kroegel was hired by the Florida Audubon Society to protect Pelican Island. It was at the urging of both the Florida Audubon Society and the American Ornithologist's Union, that President Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt issued the Executive Order on March 14, 1903, proclaiming Pelican Island be "reserved and set aside...as a preserve and breeding ground for native birds". Two weeks later, on April 1, Kroegel was appointed warden by the federal government for a salary of \$1 per month. The refuge was expanded by a second executive order to include several neighboring mangrove islands on January 26, 1909.

The threat from plume hunters diminished, but a new threat was looming. In the Spring of 1918, a group of young commercial fishermen set out for Pelican Island at night and killed hundreds of defenseless pelican chicks. They claimed that the pelicans were taking too many fish. This controversy was spreading until a Florida Audubon Society study showed that the bulk of the pelican's diet consisted of commercially unimportant baitfish.

Paul Kroegel protected and managed Pelican Island NWR until 1926 after the island became flooded and the pelicans abandoned Pelican Island for several years. Freezes and floods had taken their toll on Pelican Island over the years, but the island and the birds have always recovered from natural disasters.



In 1963, an unnatural threat arose. The bottomlands surrounding Pelican Island were proposed to be sold by the State to private development. The Indian River Preservation League was formed by local citrus growers, commercial fishermen, and sportsmen to fight this proposal which included the dredging of a bulkhead and filling of vitally important seagrass beds. The local citizens won their fight. The State leased the 616 acres of nearby mangrove islands to Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge. The lease with the State was renewed in 1968 to encompass about 4760 acres of submerged bottomlands and grass beds. Since 1979, the refuge has acquired over 100 acres of buffer along the shoreline of the adjacent barrier island. The buffer will help protect the integrity of the nation's first national wildlife refuge from encroaching residential development.

The black and white photos were taken during the Kroegel years.

Pelican Island, a small three-acre island on Florida's east central coast, holds a unique place in America's

history. In 1903, Pelican Island became

the nation's first national wildlife refuge. From this small beginning has grown a national wildlife refuge system of over 500 refuges encompassing over 92 million acres.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge
 c/o Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge
 P.O. Box 6504
 Titusville, Florida 32780



Wildlife

After years of decimation at the hands of plume hunters and the ravishing effects of DDT, the birds have begun to make a comeback. The diversity of bird species as seen in 1859 can be seen again. However, the total number of birds that once were counted in the



thousands, are now counted in the hundreds. One explanation is that the island has diminished in size due to erosion. Another reason may be that the once ground-nesting pelicans compete with other birds for the limited space in mangroves.

At least a dozen different species of colonial nesting birds use Pelican Island. Those include the Brown Pelican, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Reddish Egret, Cattle Egret, Great Blue Heron, Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Green-backed Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Double-crested Cormorant,

White Ibis and Wood Stork. The Wood Stork and White Ibis first started to appear in the 1960's as a result of losing habitat in the Everglades.

Other species that nest within the refuge include the

American Oyster-catcher, the Anhinga, and the Osprey. The Roseate Spoonbill



visits the island during the summer, along with Magnificent Frigatebird, and Least Tern. Winter visitors include White Pelican, migrating Double-crested Cormorants, a variety of waterfowl, gulls, terns, and shorebirds.

Pelican Island is also home to about a dozen different federally listed species including the endangered Wood Stork, West Indian Manatee, Green Sea Turtle, Hawksbill Sea Turtle, and the Short-nosed Sturgeon. Threatened species include the Bald Eagle, Roseate Tern, Piping Plover, Loggerhead Sea Turtle, Atlantic Salt Marsh Snake and Eastern Indigo Snake.

The waters of Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge contain important seagrass and mangrove habitat for over 600 species of fish, a significant population of immature sea turtles, and playful marine mammals like the manatees and bottlenose dolphins. Year-round slow speed zones within 600 feet of the shoreline, including Spratt Creek, protect the manatees in these important foraging areas.

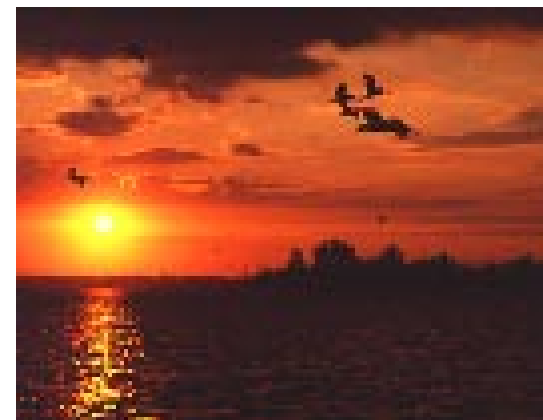


Recreation

Pelican Island offers good sportfishing opportunities as well as clamming and oystering. Popular fish among anglers include Snook, Spotted Sea Trout, Redfish, Tarpon, Black Mullet and Mangrove Snapper. The waters of the refuge are Class II designated, the only waters in Indian River County clean enough for harvesting and consuming shellfish.



Other wildlife-oriented recreational opportunities include wildlife observation and photography.



Nonwildlife-oriented recreation

includes boating, which is permitted throughout the refuge. Boating near Pelican Island, however, is restricted to outside the posted closed area surrounding the island. Please use caution when boating over shallow grass beds and near bird rookeries.

Picnicking and overnight camping is permitted on the Spoil Islands IR4, IR5, and IR6, opposite the Sebastian Yacht Club and Main Street boat ramps. Please remove all trash after visiting the refuge. Plastic bags and fishing lines can be especially hazardous to fish and wildlife.

To report marine turtle or marine mammal strandings, call 1-800-DIAL-FMP.

"To waste, to destroy, our natural resources...will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them."



- 1964** Pelican Island was designated a National Historic Landmark.
- 1970** Pelican Island became the smallest area incorporated into the National Wilderness Areas System.
- 1993** Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge was designated a Wetland of International Importance.
- 2003** Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, as well as the whole National Wildlife Refuge System, celebrates its Centennial.

Location

Pelican Island is located in the Indian River Lagoon between Sebastian, the official "home of Pelican Island" and Wabasso. Situated in northern Indian River County, Sebastian and Wabasso are accessible from I-95 via State Road 512. State Road 510 provides a direct link between 512 and Wabasso.



For more information, contact:
 Refuge Manager
 Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge
 P.O. Box 6504
 Titusville, FL 32780
 407/861-0667

