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10.1 Introduction

The American white pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*, hereafter referred to as “pelican”) soars high in the skies throughout North America using its large wingspan (2–3 m) to carry its heavy (5–9 kg) body along rivers, lakes, and reservoirs (Knopf and Evans 2004). Gregarious birds by nature, white pelicans often fly in flocks, spiraling in unison high in the sky with the help of the rising column of warm air in thermals. Pelicans are easily recognized by their large, orange-colored pouched bills. Contrary to popular belief, they do not use their bill to carry food, but rather they use it like a net to scoop up fish, crustaceans, and occasionally small mammals. Unlike brown pelicans that plunge into the water to capture fish on their own, American white pelicans are cooperative hunters. They can often be seen swimming and dipping their bills into the water together as they drive fish into shallow areas for capture (Fig. 10.1).

Fossil evidence suggests that pelicans have held a place in the Great Salt Lake (GSL) region for at least 125,000 years (Mengel 1952; Howard 1955; Wetmore 1933). They have witnessed glacial accretion and recession, the rise and fall of Lake Bonneville (Oviatt et al. 1992), the arrival of the first humans in North America



Fig. 10.1 American white pelicans herding fish (Photo credit: Mia McPherson)