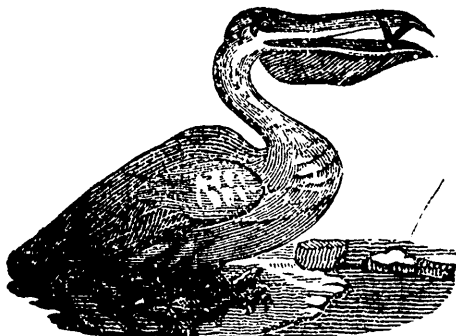


NATURAL HISTORY.



THE PELICAN.

The great white pelican of Africa is much larger than a swan, and something of the same shape and colour. But that singularity in which it differs from all other birds is in the bill, and the great pouch underneath, which are wonderful, and demands a description.

This enormous bill is fifteen inches from the point to the opening of the mouth, which is a good way back behind the eyes. The base of the bill is somewhat greenish: but it varies towards the end, being of a reddish blue. To the lower edges of the under-chap, hangs a bag, reaching the whole length of the bill to the neck, which is said to be capable of containing fifteen quarts of water. This bag the bird has a power of wrinkling up into the hollow of the under-chap; but, by opening the bill, and putting one's hand down into the bag, it may be distended at pleasure.

Tertre affirms, that this pouch will hold as many fish as will serve sixty hungry men for a meal: Such is the formation of this extraordinary bird, which is a native of Africa and America.

They are all torpid and inactive to the last degree, so that nothing can exceed their indolence but their gluttony. It is only from the stimulations of hunger that they are excited to labour; for otherwise they would continue always in fixed repose. When they have rais-

ed themselves about thirty or forty feet above the surface of the sea, they turn their head, with one eye downwards, and continue to fly in that posture. As soon as they perceive a fish sufficiently near the surface, they dart down upon it with the swiftness of an arrow, seize it with unerring certainty, and store it up in their pouch. They then rise again, though not without great labour, and continue hovering and fishing, with their head on one side as before. This work they continue, with great effort and industry, till their bag is full; and then fly to land, to devour and digest, at leisure, the fruits of their industry.

Gessner tells us, that the emperor Maximilian had a tame pelican, which lived for above eighty years, and which always attended his army on their march.

With all the seeming indolence of this bird, it is not entirely incapable of instruction in a domestic state. Father Raymond assures us, that he has seen one so tame and well educated among the native Americans, that it would go off in the morning, at the word of command, and return before night to its master, with its great pouch distended with plunder; a part of which the savages would make it disgorge, and a part they would permit it to reserve for itself.

“The pelican,” as Fabre relates, “is not destitute of other qualifications. One which