



An Eastern White Pelican eats a pigeon in St.James's Park, London The pelican is predominantly found in South East Europe and Central Asia where it feeds on small fish (Cathal McNaughton/PA)

Pigeon makes a change to pelican's bill of fare
By Lewis Smith, Environment Reporter

PELICANS eat fish. It's well known. Except when they take a fancy to pigeon.

One luckless pigeon was pottering about St James's Park in Central London, looking for titbits from tourists, when a pelican scooped it up in its bill.

Horrified children on their half-term break were left in tears as the pigeon struggled for 20 minutes in the eastern white pelican's beak before being swallowed. The bizarre form of pest control astonished ornithologists. "All the books say pelicans live on a diet of fish," a spokeswoman for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds said. "This is quite extraordinary."

Cathal McNaughton, the Press Association photographer who pictured the pigeon being eaten, said that the pelican's actions caught everyone by surprise. He said: "The pelican was on the towpath preening itself, and tourists had been standing next to it to have their pictures taken.

"Then the bird wandered up the towpath and, completely out of the blue, it snatched the pigeon off the ground.

"There was a bit of a struggle for about 20 minutes, with all these people watching. The pelican only opened its mouth a couple of times. Then it managed to get the pigeon to go head first down its throat. It was kicking and flapping the whole way down."

The pelicans are fed 12lb (5½kg) of fish every day, by the Royal Park's officers. In the wild the birds feed in groups by herding small fish into the shallows before scooping them up.

Pelicans were introduced to the park in 1664 as a gift to Charles II from the Russian ambassador. Four eastern white pelicans and one Louisiana brown pelican are currently resident. Eastern whites went into steep decline during the 20th century, but they are now on the increase, with 4,000 breeding pairs.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-2420561,00.html>