

Pelican Place Series

The idea behind the Pelican Place series is that as with penguins, pelicans are delightfully attractive birds, whose flying skills and slightly silly demeanor capture the imagination of people, young and old, and as such can provide a platform for exploring a variety of STEM topics in a non-frightening way. While my target audience are children ages nine through 12, I'm hoping to attract the attention of parents who will see the series as a way to help their children develop reading skills while exposing them to concepts that in the classroom may seem dull and pedantic.

The point of all of this is to produce a series of books explaining subjects that human grade school students may find helpful in coming to grips with new terms, concepts, and mostly relationships. What I have in mind here is that with numbers for instance, rarely is there much meaning in a single one without reference in another. If, for instance, Papa P says he caught 6 anchovies today, that might be good or bad in comparison with the amount of time or number of dives it took him to get them.

An added benefit of looking at things from the pelican point of view is that their approach to life is rooted in statistical analysis, though they deal with this intuitively, though trial-and-error is firmly rooted in their DNA.

Pelicans are among the finest aviators in the natural world, so it makes sense to take advantage of their skills in explaining concepts that are both fun and useful to humans.

The series by-and-large revolves around pelican flight student training, it will also areas that will help readers understand more about the principles and premises involved in their day-to-day existence and experiences.

So here are some of the areas we will explore:

Unless otherwise stated, we will be using human--in fact US--numbers and measurements throughout the book, explaining differences as we go along.

So we'll start here with a word here about pelican counting and how it differs from the human variety. For the most part--in fact these days it's pretty much universal--humans use what is a decimal system using multiples of numbers one through ten both in ascending (1, 11, 101, 1001, etc.) and descending (1, 0.1, 0.01, 0.001, etc.). Often as in the case of very large or small numbers are represented by multiples of tens (e.g. one billion can be expressed as 1,000,000,000 or more simply 10^9 or one billionth as 10^{-9}). While humans are good at working with it--most likely because they have 10 fingers with which to count, the decimal system is really quite awkward compared for instance with either a duodecimal (base 12) or octal (base 8) system, the latter being that used by pelicans around the world.

Put into context, pelicans count from one to eight just as humans, but instead of nine, their next number is one-one or 11. Thereafter as one continues to count, what humans would call 17 is to pelicans 21, 25 becomes 31, continuing in this manner all the way up to 64, which in pelican terms is 88, after which were larger numbers necessary (which is almost never) they just change the scale and start over.

An example of how this works might be a journey from Pelican Place up the coast to Santa Barbara, some thirty miles by human reckoning. Well miles mean nothing

to pelicans, but time does, and time and distance can be measured in a number of ways...heart beats, wing beats, tick marks of longitude and latitude on an aviation map, or magnetic pulses recorded and then compared to data stored in the pelican's internal navigation system.

From Pelican Place, the Santa Barbara pier lies 7 sequences of 41 magnetic pulses west and 7 sequences of 4 pulses north. Determining the time, direction, and wind vector then is a matter of comparing another element--wing beats for example--to a standard reference for magnetic pulses...74 (60 as humans count) wing beats per pulse in standard day no wind conditions.

As for the pelican calendar, it too is octal, arriving at a year through 8 months of 45 days with the remaining 5.25 days accounted for by holidays at the end of each 2-month cycle and an additional one or two days for the pelican day celebration. The beauty of the calendar system is that it synchronizes well with the daily clock in which while duodecimal in its base it achieves the same 360 degree face as does the pelican's magnetic pulse map.

Now is not the time to go into pelican language, though we will dip into the subject from time to time when the need arises. As a quick and dirty overview, however, we do need to cover one special feature: pelican communication is largely non-verbal, which is to say that the bulk of information important to guide their actions is known and understood by all.

Things that to humans involve conceptualization are grasped intuitively by pelicans, appearing to us as if they were hard-wired into their consciousness. At some level this is correct, but only up to a point. Pelicans through the ages have worked to simplify their lives rather than make them more complicated. An example of this can be seen in how they choose leaders.

At the moment, Pelican Place's top banana is Leopold, great, great, great uncle to GP who is the main character in this story. But if Leopold were to become incapacitated or die, his place would immediately and automatically be taken by someone else just as he had assumed command when his predecessor, Agnes, ran head-on to the spike of a swordfish while diving into a school of anchovies.

Just an instant before the collision, Leopold was just an ordinary pelican doing what he had always done. All at once he found himself Pelican Place's leader. No big deal, he led and the others followed. No explanations, no campaign speeches or promises, and in fact throughout his rule, he would issue no orders, make no rules, or exercise what we would call "authority." Life would go on as always without a hitch.

Citizens of America, unlike those of most nations have a very deep succession plan, numbering more than 200 at the moment, so it—for instance—invaders from Alpha Centauri come blasting into our solar system and start knocking off our leaders, they'd have a long way to go and each successor could be certain of support from the populous.

Pelican Code of Conduct

What pelicans around the globe adopted as their Code of Conduct was in fact the slightly modified parting address to a son headed off to school by one who is known throughout the colonies as Pelonius P, a verbose and rather bumbling bureaucrat who for some unknown reason was chosen by the Beloved Spirit to convey what is certainly one of the most succinct proscriptions for proper behavior to be found. Pelicans understand this much of the situation, but from there the

storyline of the play becomes beyond all comprehension as the concepts of jealousy, rage, plunder or murder lies well outside their experience.

In fact nearly all of what humans call crime are foreign to them, so much so that the closest any of them can come to the concept took occurred in some nark place long ago and far away when a pelican named Julius P was said to have been caught cheating at poker and banished to the Dry Tortugas.

Ages later a British playwright erroneously known by the name of Shakespeare apparently was able to decipher *Pelicanese*, lifting the code almost word for word and ascribing its precepts to a courtier in a parting address to his son, Laertes. Sadly the young man had neither the time nor wisdom to put them to use, ending up hoisted on his own petard, so to speak, an allusion more familiar to them after a good meal that being nicked by one's own poisoned sword.

Preflight: An Example

"Up! Up! Up! sleepyheads," Mama P scolded GP and his 20 minute younger sister (and therefore) Baby P Two, who would in time come to be known as Pattycakes. Today was the beginning of preflight training for this year's crop of adolescent California Browns enjoying the good life at Pelican Place, a low-lying island in the middle of the Santa Barbara chain identified on maps as Anacapa.

Chief flight instructor, Lieutenant Percival, was a stickler for everything young pelicans weren't, a long list that included such traits as timeliness, attention to personal appearance, respect for elders, industriousness, desire for knowledge, and above all a keen sense of decorum when it came to classroom behavior. It was not that any of the rookery's adults was surprised or even disappointed that the young behaved in a manner often described as that of a bunch of wild Indians, whooping

and screeching from dawn to dusk, and then avoiding chores with an enthusiasm that made their otherwise excessive behavior pale by comparison. Today, however, Mama P's patience was about worn through to the bone as GP had managed to drip raspberry juice all over his white cadet blouse last evening, making it too late to clean or replace. "Ah, well," she sighed resignedly, there were bound to be three or four more uniforms in similar or even worse condition, and besides, Lt. Percival would be pleased to have some good targets for his zeal.

"Get on with your preening while I make breakfast ready," she ordered, and several seconds later, "...Now! I mean now or there will be no pancakes and maple syrup." Of course it really wasn't pancakes and maple syrup--those are people things--but for the denizens of Pelican Place, anchovies with a little abalone sauce was pretty much the same thing, except for being a little healthier. Also, of course, Pattycakes needed no extra encouragement to settle her feathers properly, but GP's grooming was a different matter, requiring bribery of a special sort.

When Papa P arrived fresh from his dawn scouting mission in the waters to the west of Pelican Place near what the map on the wall of the nearby Coast Guard Station called Santa Cruz Island, the little family sat down to their first but hopefully not last meal of the day, heads bowed while its patriarch chanted the blessing.

"Beloved Spirit that unites the souls of all creatures of the land, sea, and air, we thank you for the bounty you set before us, tending to our needs as you see fit, and allowing us to glimpse the majesty of your creation that lies all around us..." And after a bit, "GP, keep your yap shut or I'll shut it for you."

Tomorrow it will be the same, Mama thought. GP is no different than all the boys who had passed through her nest.

Here it's a good time to explain a little about families, their names, societies, clans, and bonds, so let's start with Mama and Papa P.

If you were to call out, "Mama P," nearly every female pelican on the rookery over the age of three would turn to see what you wanted. It's a generic term having significance only within the family circle. Ditto Papa P and Baby Ps One through perhaps as many as Four, the number established by the yield of any year's crop of hatchlings within the family.

While offspring from the previous two seasons still hang around the family patch, they have earned their own names, and will in most cases become Mama or Papa Ps in their third year, setting up their own nesting areas and going about their child rearing duties pretty much on their own. An exception to this is family day, the species' version of Thanksgiving, when all pelicans return to the home of their birth to celebrate the abundance and beauty the Beloved Spirit had bestowed on them during the year.

In this little family, Mama P's real name, earned upon her first birthday, is Henrietta. Papa P's is George. To others, GP is George and Henrietta's Baby P One, and Pattycakes, Baby P Two. There might have been a Three and Four, but their DDT^{<1>} weakened egg shells were too soft to stand the pressure of the incubation process in which Mama and Papa P took turn keeping the eggs warm by standing on them. Blood flowing through the webs of their feet provide the heat necessary to make up for that lost to the atmosphere. [need to come up with temperatures and transfer details].

<1>DDT is a chemical pesticide in broad use by farmers when GP was born, but has since been banned in the area adjacent to Pelican Place, as will be explained in a later chapter.

When the letter "P" is ascribed to someone outside the family or colony, it has great significance, as in the case of Pelonius P or the scoundrel, Julius P. Within the family "P" is added as a term of affection, whereas within the colony it is a term of respect, so that the leader is called Leopold P both to his face and in normal conversation. The late Agnes would be Agnes P for the year following her demise, after which only her family might refer to her as such.

Pelican Flight Academy

Pelican Place Flight Academy sits on the furthest east point of the island, allowing overwater approaches into the face of prevailing fair weather winds. The location and orientation protect members of the colony from being blindsided by cadets on their occasional out-of-control landing approaches.

The classrooms, one of which is to be preflight cadets' domain for the next three months is a triangular patch of grass protected from winds and weather by a fortress of large rocks. Flight School proper takes place on the north side of the rock wall, giving it additional protection from wind and spray that often accompany stormy winds and swells from the south. Over the years thousands of young pelicans have come here to learn their traditions as well as their trade, proudly upon graduation displaying their obsidian wings encrusted with mother-of-pearl alma mater logo and letters, a representation of the island rookery flanked by the letters, PP.

Classes at the academy begin promptly at 0700 from what our calendars know as April to October, 0800 during the winter. The Preflight course runs from July to October each year with an additional month set aside for those who need more training. Nobody ever fails--it is not permitted--but it is acknowledged that some cadets need more time to complete their coursework. Those who have passed their

preflight exams the first time through have the time off to romp and play such favorite games as hide-and-seek, snatch a feather from a donkey's tail, and on rare rainy days, blind bird's bluff.

“Good morning cadets,” Lieutenant Percival says to the group of frolicking fledglings whooping and hollering on this, their first day of preflight training.

“Cadets,” he calls out, louder this time, but without conviction he might gain their attention. Once more as is his annual custom he bellows for order, perfectly content that as in all the years he has presided over the opening of the school year his voice will fall on deaf ears. Then, a big smile lighting up his face, he reaches into the bottom drawer of his desk and produces an air horn, whose blast at last brings the uproar to an satisfactory halt.

“Take your seats, cadets and quit your yammering,” he instructs the chastened horde which they do, turning their full attention on the one who is to be their chief instructor and autocratic master of their existence for the next three months of their lives.

“Now, before we begin our lessons, who would like to lead us in our pledge of allegiance?” No one moves so much as a feather, so without pause he continues, “Ah, well no matter. “Sally Sue, let's start with you today.”