

BIRD MYTHS & SUPERSTITIONS #3



Pelicans are regarded as birds that symbolise self-sacrifice and the love of a parent for their children. Pelicans store food in their pouches and then retrieve the food for their chicks when they return to the nest. This simple action was misinterpreted in times gone past and people believed that the pelican was making the ultimate sacrifice of tearing open its own chest to feed the youngsters on its own blood. There are many variations on the story of a male pelican who's young have died or been killed, and that after three days of mourning and wailing the father pelican kills himself so that the young pelicans can arise from the dead hale and hearty. These stories were used as allegories during the Middle Ages of the Christ's passion and suffering, especially of the wound that he suffered when a lance pierced his side. Thomas Aquinas wrote of the 'Pelican of mercy, Jesu' and St Gertrude had a vision of Jesus as a pelican feeding the hungry with his blood. It was also thought that pelicans would only eat just enough food to keep themselves alive, so they also became associated with those who fasted and purified themselves for religious reasons. If you have watched pelicans feeding, you will know this last pelican superstition to be untrue!