

SPECIALIST GROUP ON STORKS, IBISES, and SPOONBILLS: 3-YEAR SUMMARY

Since the creation of the ICBP Specialist Group on Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills in 1981, the major objectives of the Group have been to locate key individuals worldwide who are involved in research and conservation of the 42 ciconiiform species covered under the Group, and to gather available information on the status and conservation priorities for these species. Recent activities have included actual promotion and coordination of specific research and conservation programs for select species in various parts of the world. The major SIS projects since the last ICBP World Conference have spanned three continents and numerous countries. Brief summaries of key projects are included in this report.

With the assistance of many contacts worldwide, the following materials have been produced by the Specialist Group, printed courtesy of the Brehm Fund for International Bird Conservation (Walsrode, West Germany):

- * World Working Group on Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills (former name), Report 1, Summer, 1983.
- * World Working Group on Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills, Report 2, 1984.
- * Selected Bibliography on Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills (1984).
- * ICBP/IWRB Specialist Group on Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills, Report 3, 1986 (available at ICBP World Conference).

Additional articles on specific SIS projects have appeared in the newsletter of the Brehm Fund, "Flying Free" ("Zum Fliegen Geboren"), as follows:

- Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter, 1983): "Colonial waterbird censusing in northern South America"; "The most endangered ibis in the world"
- Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring, 1984): "Scarlet Ibis: Model Species for Conservation"; "Important steps for the Eastern White Stork at Vogel-park"; "Short report of the World Working Group on Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills"
- Vol. 2, No. 2 (Summer/Autumn, 1984): "A major Crested Ibis conservation effort in China"; "White Storks of the Far East: Encouraging news"
- Vol. 3, No. 1/2 (Spring/Summer, 1985): "International Stork Conservation Symposium in Vogelpark Walsrode"
- Vol. 3, No. 3/4 (Autumn/Winter, 1985): "Stork Symposium highlights"; "Jabiru, king of them all"; "Coastal Conservation Campaign-Venezuela"; "A glimpse into Vietnam".

In addition, numerous research reports and scientific papers have been written and printed in various journals. Listings of these reports exist in the "Selected Bibliography" mentioned above, and further current listings will be printed in 1986. Mention should be made of the forthcoming book on storks, ibises, and spoonbills of the world, currently being prepared by two well-known authors. The book is expected in 1988.

ICBP/IWRB SPECIALIST GROUP on STORKS, IBISES, and SPOONBILLS
DESCRIPTION OF MAJOR PROJECTS, 1983-1986

NEOTROPICS

I. Coastal and Interior wetlands of northern South America

During the three years, 1982-84, the SIS Specialist Group coordinated extensive aerial surveys for large waterbirds over coastal wetlands of six countries: Venezuela, Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, and northern Brazil. The vast llanos of central Venezuela were also included in these surveys, which were supported by the Brehm Fund in 1982 and 1984, and by the Fundación Polar in Venezuela in 1983. Additional ground work was carried out by colleagues in Colombia, Venezuela, Trinidad, Suriname, and French Guiana. The focus of these censuses were the colonial waterbirds, and particularly the breeding population of Scarlet Ibis, Eudocimus ruber.

Important waterbird colonies and significant wetlands were located during the censuses. In addition, population estimates of 12 waterbird species were made in most countries. These data were useful for the IWRB/ICBP Neotropical Wetlands Programme of 1983-85.

Information from our censuses has helped determine the breeding status of the Scarlet Ibis throughout most of its range. We found that the coastal population is precariously small, as the mangrove forests have been badly impacted throughout the region, and hunting, poaching of young, and excessive disturbance to the nests are prevalent in many areas.

Our initial research has led to the development of two separate programmes: the Caroni Swamp/Scarlet Ibis Campaign of Trinidad, and the Coastal Conservation Campaign in Venezuela.

Caroni Swamp Campaign: During the 1950's and 1960's, this mangrove forest consistently housed a large breeding population of Scarlet Ibis. Since the early 1970's, however, the ibis have not bred there due to habitat loss, hunting, and frequent disturbance by visitors, and fishermen. An international letter-writing campaign encouraged by the SIS Group brought much attention to this wetland area, and elicited local and international concern for the swamp and the Scarlet Ibis. A full issue of the national natural history magazine, NATURALIST (December, 1985) was dedicated to the Caroni Swamp and the plight of the Scarlet Ibis. Through this and other channels, the local awareness of problems in the swamp has increased. Although still pending declaration as a national park, as was proposed in 1979, the Caroni Swamp is presently benefited by greater vigilance of the forestry wardens, and we expect the future of the Scarlet Ibis to be brighter.

Coastal Conservation Campaign-Venezuela: The aerial surveys clearly demonstrated an urgent need to focus special attention on the dwindling coastal wetland resources in Venezuela. The Coastal Conservation Campaign-Venezuela, developed by SIS Chairman Charles Luthin, was an answer to this need. This Campaign, which includes further research, political action, and public education and awareness programmes, focuses on two important exemplary coastal

Coastal Conservation Campaign-Venezuela (cont.):

waterbird species: the Scarlet Ibis and the Flamingo. In 1985 the "CCC-Venezuela" was incorporated into a comprehensive wetland conservation programme proposal developed by FUDENA, the national WWF affiliate of Venezuela. Funding is presently being sought for the CCC and the other wetland programmes.

II. Jabiru Stork in Central America

SIS colleagues throughout Central America have provided substantial information on the Jabiru Stork, Jabiru mycteria, the largest flying bird in the Americas, in order to classify the regional population as ENDANGERED. This has prompted the development of a major international effort for the species throughout the region, incorporating further research, information coordination, public education, volunteer assistance, and political (policy-making) action. Specific activities include:

1. Censusing and population monitoring. The storks are being counted and observed in Costa Rica and Nicaragua in studies from the ground, and aerial censuses and nest counts are being undertaken in Belize and southern Mexico. Funding from ICBP-Pan Am Section and the Brehm Fund have expanded these censuses to include all of Belize (1984-86), where five nests are being monitored, and the states of Quintana Roo, Tabasco, and Campeche, Mexico. Helicopter flights courtesy of PEMEX Oil Company in Mexico have helped locate important nesting sites for the Jabiru in these latter two states. in 1985 and 1986.
2. Jabiru "flyer" and questionnaire. An identification flyer about the Jabiru Stork and the Wood Stork (Mycteria americana) was printed by the Brehm Fund for distribution in Belize. Accompanying this flyer will be a questionnaire requesting information on the whereabouts of the two species in the country. These materials will be distributed in 1986 to Peace Corps workers, pilots, government agencies working in rural areas of the country, and school teachers in an effort to stimulate local interest and to develop awareness among individuals working where the storks occur. The flyer is being translated into Spanish for distribution in Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica in 1986.
3. Jabiru Conservation Poster. A Mexican artist is presently completing a full-size poster illustrating the Jabiru on its nest, and making a plea for protection of the species. The poster will be printed in Spanish and English, and will be distributed throughout Central America in 1986.
4. Symposium on the Conservation of the Tabasco and Campeche (Mexico) Wetlands, February, 1987. A major breeding area of the Jabiru Stork is found in the states of Tabasco and Campeche. In view of the eminent threats of development on this as-of-yet pristine wetland area, an international symposium coordinated by the Brehm Fund and INIREB of Tabasco State, Mexico, will focus on the valuable wildlife and natural resources of these impressive wetlands. INIREB will present a carefully developed plan to protect these wetland areas for action by federal and state government agencies.

III. Central American (Regional) Working Group on Large Waterbirds

In order to effectively establish communication among scientists and conservationists involved in large waterbird projects in Central America, a regional Working Group network has recently been created. With small grants from ICBP-Pan Am and the Brehm Fund, Coordinator Jorge Correa of Mexico will accumulate further data on large waders and conservation priorities for regional wetlands in an eight-country zone, and will be distributing pertinent conservation materials (e.g. the Jabiru flyers and posters) developed by the SIS Specialist Group. A slide program on regional wetland conservation for use in schools will be developed in 1986 with financial support from ICBP-Pan Am and the Brehm Fund.

EUROPE/AFRICA

I. International Stork Conservation Symposium (1985).

A species which has attracted major attention and international concern, particularly in Europe, has been the White Stork, Ciconia ciconia. The rapid population decline of the stork in northern and western Europe in recent years has been most alarming. In order to try to solve some of the complicated problems responsible for this decline, an international stork symposium was held in October, 1985, organized and hosted by the Vogelpark Walsrode (West Germany) and financed by the Brehm Fund. This symposium attracted 71 participants representing 28 countries in which the White Stork occurs. Current status reports on the White Stork breeding and wintering populations were presented, and regional working groups established specific national and international conservation priorities for the storks during the symposium. ICBP will be publishing significant papers in a forthcoming Technical Publication on the White Stork.

II. Networking

A large number of ciconiiform species occur in many African nations. This group of species, however, has been little studied, and the goal of the Specialist Group on Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills is to continue extending its network on the continent, and to promote further research activities. Four species of interest to the Group have been listed in the recent African bird Red Data Book (ICBP, 1985), including the Shoebill, Balaeniceps rex, the Northern Bald Ibis (Waldrapp), Geronticus eremita, Southern Bald Ibis, G. calvus, and the Dwarf Olive Ibis, Bostrychia bocagei. Further studies may reveal that other species may be locally or regionally threatened.

ASIA

I. Oriental Crested Ibis

The SIS Specialist Group has indicated in its Report 2 (1984) that the Oriental Crested Ibis, Nipponia nippon, is of highest priority. With a total known world population of 21 individuals, it is one of the rarest avian species in the world. A comprehensive Crested Ibis programme has been developed, and includes research, protection of habitat, and captive propagation. In 1984-85, radio-telemetry and other research equipment (binoculars, spotting scopes, walkie-talkies, etc.) were provided by the Brehm Fund for the Crested Ibis project in China. Additionally, complete plans for a Crested Ibis breeding center were developed by the Vogelpark Walsrode's

architect and sent to the Chinese government in 1985. Construction of the breeding center is planned for 1986, pending acquisition of adequate funds.

II. Oriental (Eastern) White Stork

The Oriental White Stork, Ciconia boyciana, is considered an endangered species by the Specialist Group. Using the extensive experience of White Stork researchers in Europe, the recently formed Eastern White Stork Working Group has developed a conservation/management plan for the species throughout East Asia, finalized during the International Stork Conservation Symposium in Germany in October, 1985. A ringing program for the storks was initiated in 1984 by Soviet scientists, and will be continued in coming years. Chinese scientists reported sightings of the storks in their wintering grounds in south-central China in 1985. As the stork management plan begins to be fully implemented by colleagues in China, the Soviet Union, and Japan, we anticipate positive results for the storks. The Specialist Group hopes to bring together all Oriental White Stork researchers during the May, 1987 International Crane Workshop in China.

III. Openbill Stork Research-Thailand

The Openbill Stork (Anastomus oscitans) colony at Wat Phai Lom, Thailand, just 40 km from Bangkok, is the largest colony of this species throughout Asia. Over 10,000 pairs nest there annually. Recognizing the importance of this colony and its vulnerability, the SIS has promoted and sponsored a 6-month study at Wat Phai Lom in 1985, funded by the Brehm Fund. The data are now being analyzed, and we hope to elucidate the reasons for recent declines in the colony. The research results will be applied toward habitat management and conservation activities for the species in Thailand.

IV. Vietnam waterbirds

Vietnam is rich in diversity and numbers of waterbird species. Five major waterbird colonies have recently been discovered in the south of the country, in the mangrove and Melaleuca forests of Minh Hai Province. Many ciconiiform species which breed there are rare throughout SE Asia, and therefore these colonies are of special interest to the SIS Specialist Group. After a brief visit to Vietnam in 1985, Chairman C. Luthin proposed a variety of management activities for these colonies. The SIS Specialist Group will be very actively involved in research and conservation activities in Vietnam in the coming years.

The diverse and numerous activities undertaken by participants involved in the SIS Group are frequently reported in the SIS reports, and occasionally in the newsletter of the Brehm Fund. A list of all participants and their various interests is planned for completion in 1986.

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