

World Working Group on Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills

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World Working Group on Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills

The WORLD WORKING GROUP ON STORKS, IBISES, AND SPOONBILLS was created under the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) in 1981 to coordinate data gathering and to determine the status of the members of these avian families (Ciconiidae and Threskiornithidae) of the order Ciconiiformes. By assembling information on current distribution, ecology, and population sizes of these species, conservation priorities for the birds and their habitats can be determined, and subsequent conservation projects can be developed and implemented. It is hoped that this initial summary, WWG-SIS Report No. 1, can serve as a preliminary guideline for scientists and conservationists around the world for pinpointing and clarifying research and conservation needs for these large waders. Once more information is gathered from our ever-growing list of Working Group participants, we can provide a more complete report of the status and needs of these species.

Frequently conservationists treat a species in its entirety, without carefully assessing what is happening on a local or regional level. Thus, a species which boasts a comfortably high population in one area, despite near or total extirpation in other areas, may be given no attention by conservationists, as the species is "secure". Additionally, migratory species constitute another complex problem. A species may be fully protected in one part of its overall range, be it a breeding or "wintering" area, but is hunted, trapped, or otherwise exploited, or is faced with habitat loss and/or pesticide poisoning in another part of its range. Ergo, in the area where the species is protected,

conservationists may gain a false impression that the species is in quite good shape, but in fact the species may be extremely threatened with extinction. Only a coordinated communication network can help determine the overall picture for a species.

Through cooperation of active Working Group members, bird watchers, and other scientists, conservationists, and governmental agencies, the WWG-SIS hopes to determine the status of each of the 52 species in each region where these birds are found. Needless to say, this is a formidable task, and needs the attention and assistance of many individuals around the world. The WWG-SIS is always eager to receive further information on the status of these species and their habitats in order to affect conservation initiatives where needed.

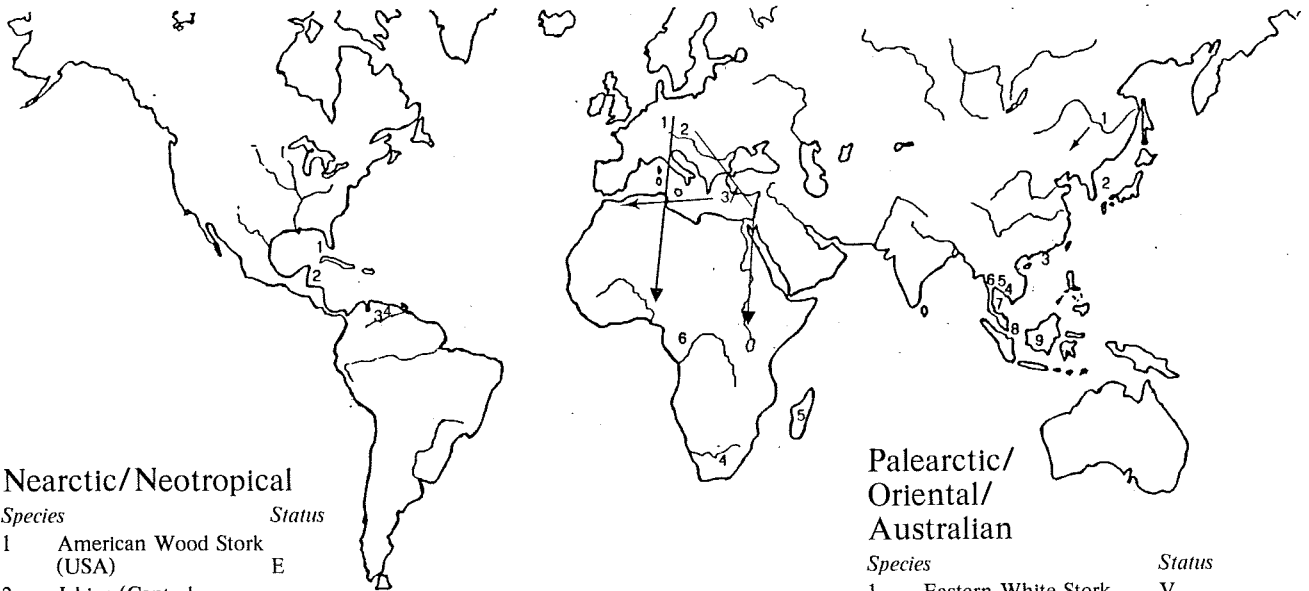
The following brief summaries are intended to give a general overview of the status of the species of highest concern to the WWG-SIS. These species are either endangered, threatened, or rare in part or all of their overall range, or their status is unknown but likely vulnerable, based on available data. The exclusion of a species or regional population, however, may only be an indication of a paucity of accurate data, and not be representative of the actual status of the birds.

Additions and updates can be sent to:

Chairman, World Working Group on Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills

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Biogeography of threatened and endangered Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills



Nearctic/Neotropical

Species	Status
1 American Wood Stork (USA)	E
2 Jabiru (Central America)	E
3 Maguari Stork (Venezuela)	V
4 Scarlet Ibis	V

Status categories

- E = Endangered
- V = Vulnerable
- R = Rare
- U = Unknown

Palearctic/Ethiopian

Species	Status
1 European White Stork	V
2 European Black Stork	V
3 Waldrapp Ibis	E
4 Bald Ibis	V
5 Madagascar Crested Ibis	U
6 Spot-breasted and Olive Ibises	U

Palearctic/Oriental/Australian

Species	Status
1 Eastern White Stork	V
2 Japanese Crested Ibis	E
3 Black-faced Spoonbill	U (E?)
4 Giant Ibis	R, U (E?)
5 White-shouldered Ibis	U (E?)
6 Asian Open-billed Stork (Thailand)	V
7 Indian Painted Stork (Thailand)	E
8 Milky Stork	U (E?)
9 Storm's Stork	R, U

Preliminary status report and conservation priorities Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

OLD WORLD

1. Japanese Crested Ibis (*Nipponia nippon*).

Only seventeen (17) individuals of this species are known in the world. Three birds, the last of the wild Japanese population, are presently in the "Toki (Ibis) Center" on Sado Island. Six birds were captured in the winter of 1980–81 in an effort to boost reproduction by placing the birds in a breeding center, as the ibises had not bred successfully in the wild for many years. Several individuals have since died, leaving two females and a single male at the Center.

In addition to the three young Crested Ibises held in captivity in China, (two of which were taken from nests in the wild in 1983 and hand-raised), eleven birds constitute the wild flock in the mountain valleys in remote Shan-Xi Province. Chinese scientist Dr. Liu Yen Zing has been studying this population, and in this year used radio-telemetry equipment (provided by Vogelpark Walsrode) to track the wild population to their wintering grounds, in hopes of locating additional individuals (G. Archibald).

2. Giant Ibis (*Pseudibis gigantea*).

Thought at one time to be possibly extinct, as it had not been reported for many years, this species was recently found nesting by distinguished ornithologist Dr. Vo Quy in the wetlands adjacent to the Mekong River in southern Vietnam. The species, never widespread, may still be found in the lowlands of Laos and Kampuchea (e.g., Tonle Sap region), but is "certainly extinct" from Thailand (B. Lekagul).

Due to its extremely limited range, and in light of its currently unknown status and possible vulnerability due to recent military activities within the countries it inhabits, the Giant Ibis is given high priority by the Working Group.

3. White-shouldered Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa davisoni*)

This distinct subspecies of the Indian Black Ibis was once found throughout Southeast Asia from Burma through Thailand and Indochina, and south into Malaysia and Indonesia. This rather shy ibis has only been sighted in recent years from Vietnam (Vo Quy) and from Indonesian Borneo (Barito River, 1979, by Dr. J. Marshall), and is a species requiring special attention due to its probable high risk (D. Wells). There have been no records within the last six years in Thailand (B. Lekagul, P. Round), and no recent sightings in Burma (J. Sayer).

4. Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*)

This bird formally inhabited eastern Asia, including China, Hainan, Taiwan, and the Philippines, being a migrant visitor to Hong Kong and Indochina. Although the status of this spoonbill is entirely unknown, it is becoming an increasingly scarce species, and perhaps needs special attention (J. Hancock, B. King). Wintering populations are reported from northern Vietnam (Vo Quy) and Hong Kong (approximately 20 individuals in 1982, M. Chalmers). The species has probably been extirpated from the Philippines.

5. Waldrapp Ibis (*Geronticus eremita*).

The total world population for this critically endangered species is approximately 800; only 392 free-living individuals in 13 colonies in Turkey and Morocco exist in their natural habitat, and about 408 captive ibises are housed in 33 zoological gardens throughout the world. Rigorous conservation efforts by Udo Hirsch under a WWF project in Morocco have included annual censuses and initial steps toward the establishment of a national park in that country for the Waldrapps. Presently, there are 22 wild birds in the colony at Biricek, Turkey. Although several young birds which were raised in captivity were released in the 1981–1982 season, successes have been limited as most of the released birds have died or disappeared. Despite these attempts at increasing the population through a release program, the Biricek population continues to decrease (R. Sahin, U. Hirsch).

6. Bald Ibis (*Geronticus calvus*).

Fortunately, this species is not considered as rare as it once was (Siegfried, 1971), as thorough investigations have resulted in the discovery of new breeding locations for the birds. The world population (southern Africa) is estimated at between 5,000 and 8,000, and the species is considered vulnerable (D. Manry).

7. Madagascar Crested Ibis (*Lophotibis cristata*).

This Malagasy endemic species consists of two distinct populations; the western race *L. c. urschi* appears to be reasonably widespread and relatively abundant, and there is still a great deal of dry forest habitat remaining for the species. The eastern race, *L. c. cristata*, is locally common, but is potentially

vulnerable due to the rapid rate of deforestation in many areas in the eastern moist forest (D. Turner) and due to pressure from illegal hunting (O. Lagrand). A research project to investigate the status of this species has been proposed to the Malagasy government by the Vogelpark Walsrode/ WWG-SIS, and hopefully will be developed for 1984.

8. Aldabra Sacred Ibis
(*Threskiornis aethiopicus abbotti*).

This subspecies of the Sacred Ibis which inhabits exclusively the Aldabra Atoll has been listed by King (1981) in the *Red Data Book* of ICBP, as the rather small population (several hundred) has been subject to disturbance at nesting time. The ibis is now given complete protection from hunting, and seems to be an actively breeding, healthy population and appears to be little disturbed by humans. Indeed, the birds have been seen scavenging food from very near human populations (A. W. Diamond).

9,10. Spotted-breasted and Olive Ibises
(*Bostrychia rara* and *B. olivacea*).

The status and present distribution of these two species is presently unknown, but due to their solitary habits and preference for dense rain forest, they likely are becoming vulnerable, as with many other species of this rapidly shrinking habitat in Africa (J. M. Thiollay).

NEW WORLD

11. Scarlet Ibis
(*Eudocimus ruber*).

Although this species is numerically abundant (ca. 30 000 breeding pairs, A. Spaans, B. deJong, C. Ramo, M. L. Goodwin, R. ffrench), due to its patchy distribution, highly colonial nature (as many as 17 000 breeding pairs observed in one colony), and the extensive loss of habitat and increasing human disturbance, the species is considered vulnerable. Once abundant along the northern South American coast from Venezuela to southeastern Brazil, the range of the ibis has been severely diminished in recent years, and now includes only regions north of the Amazon River in Brazil, Suriname, and Venezuela, in addition to the central plains (llanos) of Venezuela. The birds no longer breed in eastern Brazil, French Guiana, and Trinidad (D. M. Teixeira, D. Scott, B. deJong, R. ffrench). In Venezuela, coastal populations are increasingly threatened with human disturbance at nesting and roosting sites, destruction of mangrove habitat, and industrial pollution. Preliminary census data for 1983 indicates reduced breeding for the species in Suriname and the Guianas, in accordance with a ten-year trend for the species (B. deJong, A. Spaans).

Ciconiidae (Storks)

OLD WORLD

1. Eastern White Stork
(*Ciconia boyciana*).

The breeding population of this species is estimated at 400–500 breeding pairs for all of the Soviet Union, the main center of distribution for the species (S. M. Smirinskii). Two wintering flocks numbering 230 individuals together were discovered and photographed by Chinese ornithologist Dr. Wang Chisan in the Yangtze River region of central China. Several wintering birds were sighted in Hong Kong in 1982 (M. Chalmers). The species is no longer found in Japan and Korea, save for occasional vagrant visitors. A coordinated banding scheme has been proposed for the storks in order to determine specific breeding and wintering grounds, migration patterns, and dispersal. Approximately 30+ specimens are maintained in zoos worldwide, but apparently have never been bred in captivity. A studbook is certainly warranted for the specimens held in zoos. Eleven young storks on breeding loan from the Soviet government are maintained at the Vogelpark, and hopefully in 1984 these birds can be bred for the first time. The species should be considered vulnerable, and perhaps endangered pending further information.

2. Milky Stork
(*Mycteria cinerea*).

Only one small breeding colony of approximately 15 individuals still remains in Malaysia. The birds are reported occasionally from eastern Sumatra (Aceh, Riau, Selatan, and Lampung Provinces), Java (e.g., Pulau Rambut), Sulawesi, and perhaps may be found in Indonesian Borneo (Kalimantan) and southern Vietnam (D. Wells, Vo Quy). The species is apparently restricted to coastal mangrove forest, a rapidly diminishing resource in Southeast Asia. Because of this specificity and the increasing disturbance and threat to its habitat, and because the stork nestlings are prone to poaching, the species is considered vulnerable, and perhaps may be found to be endangered. An aerial census of coastal wetlands is being proposed for the species throughout its range.

3. Storm's Stork
(*Ciconia stormii*).

This species (although sometimes considered a subspecies of the Woolly-necked Stork, *C. episcopus*, it apparently differs in habitat as well as appearance) has always had a limited range, which includes most of Borneo and parts of western Malaysia and southern Sumatra. It is presently known from the Pahang River drainage of peninsular Malaysia (D. Wells), southern Sumatra, western Brunei, and Central Kalimantan (D. Holmes). The species is secretive and solitary, so may be more abundant within its range than what is reported. A WWG-SIS research project is being developed for Kalimantan, in order to better determine the species' status, distribution, and habits.

4. Asian Open-billed Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*).

A single large colony of ca. 20 000 individuals is known from Thailand, just 50 km from Bangkok at a Buddhist temple, Wat Phai Lom. No other breeding colony is known for Southeast Asia, outside of India. Although the storks have bred for many years at this colony, and have been protected, there is evidence that the breeding colony has decreased in recent years, and that the nesting area has been degraded due to the expected loss of trees resulting from an excessive buildup of urates beneath the colony (P. Round, V. Chantrasmı, B. Amget). A WWG-SIS project being developed for the species includes plans for long-term monitoring of the Wat Phai Lom colony (in cooperation with the Bangkok Bird Club and the Wildlife Conservation Division), leg-banding young, egg shell and diet analysis for pesticide residues, and coordinated efforts in other countries to maintain data on movements and wintering dynamics of the birds.

5. Indian Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*).

A solitary colony of five nesting pairs and perhaps as many non-breeding individuals is all that remains of the species in Thailand. The colony is located in Thalaе Noi Non-Hunting Area in the southern portion of peninsular Thailand. Even though protected from hunting, there has been a long tradition in the region to remove eggs and young from the nests, and this illegal practice continues through today despite the presence of wardens in Thalaе Noi. With such pressure on the colony, there appears to have been no recruitment to the colony for some years, and the Thai population hovers close to extinction (B. Dobias). The status is unknown for the rest of its range through Indochina, Burma, and India.

ASIAN WETLANDS

It must be mentioned at this time that all freshwater wetlands and many coastal wetlands of Southeast Asia are critically threatened through extensive human use, alteration, and management. In many of these countries, the highest human population is in the lowlands, as this ecosystems supports the bulk of the human numbers. As a result, most of the large ciconiiforms have suffered serious population declines, due either to total habitat loss, pesticide poisoning, or direct/indirect exploitation. Although not here mentioned as threatened or endangered species, particular attention need be given such species as the Black-necked Stork, and Greater and Lesser Adjutants. Certainly these species have been seriously reduced in recent years, and perhaps totally extirpated from certain areas. Only a lack of data on these species is the reason for them being excluded from this report.

6. White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) and Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*).

Hunting pressure in certain regions of Africa where the storks overwinter and extensive habitat modification in most European countries has resulted in continually declining populations of the species. A census of the White Stork for all of Europe is

scheduled for 1984, coordinated by Dr. Ernst Schüz, who began the stork census in 1934. ICBP is assisting with this census, and more information can be obtained from ICBP Headquarters (219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 ODL, England), or from the Vogelpark.

AFRICAN STORKS

At present, not enough information has been gathered on the ciconiiforms on the African continent. Although many species have large ranges, their status in various areas may be quite disturbing. Extensive water management schemes (i.e., dams) undoubtedly alter habitat and disrupt natural flooding cycles, thereby having negative impact on these large wading species dependent on the seasonal wetlands for existence.

NEW WORLD

There exists a great gap in our knowledge about the status of New World Ciconiidae. I here present the situation for these storks in several known regions.

1. Jabiru (*Jabiru mycteria*).

This elegant stork is widespread throughout the Neotropics, but nowhere abundant. The known Central American population is certainly no more than 100 individuals, and perhaps as few as half that amount. Seven nests and approximately 40 individuals exist in Costa Rica (J. Sanchez), and nine nests and perhaps 25 total birds have been reported from Belize (W. Ford Young). A population of 25–30 birds sighted in southern Mexico may be a seasonal non-breeding group, perhaps coming from nearby Belize, although several nest sites are known from Mexico (J. Ogden). Country-by-country monitoring is recommended for this species.

2. American Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*).

This species (as far as is known) is still widespread and abundant in most of its South American range, but North American populations (southern Florida) have plummeted significantly within recent years, most probably due to extensive water management projects in the Florida wetlands. Census data indicate a breeding population of between 4200 and 4600 pairs. American scientists suggest that this species should gain endangered status on the U.S. Federal Register (J. Kushlan, J. Ogden, J. Rodgers).

3. Maguari Stork (*Ciconia maguari*).

A ten-year census of this species by Betsy Thomas in the central wetlands of Venezuela bears data suggesting that the breeding population of Maguaris has diminished by approximately 75 % in her study area. Further and more extensive censuses need be undertaken to assess the species' populations throughout the llanos, and in their non-breeding area, presumably in Bolivia.

Stork, Ibis, and Spoonbill taxonomy

Order Ciconiiformes

Family Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

Subfamily

Threskornithinae (Ibises) 25 (26) species

OLD WORLD	<i>Common Name</i>
Threskiornis aethiopicus	Sacred Ibis
T. melanocephalus (= aethiopicus melanocephalus)	Black-headed Ibis
T. molucca (= aethiopicus molucca)	Australian White Ibis
T. (= Carphibis) spinicollis	Straw-necked Ibis
Pseudibis papillosa	Indian Black Ibis
P. p. davisoni (= P. davisoni)	White-shouldered Ibis
P. (= Thaumatis) gigantea	Giant Ibis
Nipponia nippon	Japanese Crested Ibis
Bostrychia carunculata	Wattled Ibis
B. (= Hagedashia) hagedash	Hadedah
B. (= Lampribis) olivacea	Olive Ibis
B. (= Lampribis) rara	Spotted-breasted Ibis
Lophotibis cristata	Madagascar Crested Ibis
Geronticus eremita	Waldrapp (Hermit Ibis)
G. calvus	Bald Ibis
Plegadis falcinellus	Glossy Ibis

NEW WORLD	<i>Common Name</i>
Plegadis falcinellus	
P. chihi	White-faced Ibis
P. ridgwayi	Puna Ibis
Eudocimus ruber (= ruber ruber?)*	Scarlet Ibis
Eudocimus albus (= ruber albus?)*	American White Ibis
Mesembrinibis cayennensis	Green Ibis
Harpriprion (= Theristicus?) caeruleus	Plumbeous Ibis
Theristicus caudatus	Buff-necked Ibis
T. melanopsis	Black-faced Ibis
T. branickii (= melanopsis branickii)	Puna Buff-necked Ibis
Phimosus infuscatus	Whispering Ibis
Cercibis oxycerca	Sharp-tailed Ibis

Subfamily

Plataleinae (Spoonbills) 6 species

OLD WORLD	<i>Common Name</i>
Platalea alba	African Spoonbill
P. leucorodia	White Spoonbill
P. regia (= leucorodia regia)	Royal Spoonbill
P. minor	Black-faced Spoonbill
P. (= Platibis) flavipes	Yellow-billed Spoonbill

NEW WORLD	<i>Common Name</i>
P. (= Ajaja) ajaja	Roseate Spoonbill

Family Ciconiidae (Storks) 19 species

OLD WORLD

	<i>Common Name</i>
Mycteria (= Ibis) ibis	Yellow-billed Stork
M. leucocephala	Indian Painted Stork
M. cinerea	Milky Stork
Anastomus oscitans	Asian Open-billed Stork
A. lamelligerus	African Open-billed Stork
Ciconia ciconia	White Stork
C. boyciana (= C. c. boyciana)**	Eastern White Stork
C. nigra	Black Stork
C. abdimii	Abdim's Stork
C. (= Dissoura) episcopus	White-necked (Wooly-necked) Stork
C. stormi (= C. e. stormi)**	Storm's Stork
Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis	Saddle-billed Stork
E. (= Xenorhynchus) asiaticus	Black-necked Stork
Leptoptilos javanicus	Lesser Adjutant
L. dubius	Greater Adjutant
L. crumeniferus	Marabou

NEW WORLD

	<i>Common Name</i>
Mycteria americana	American Wood Stork
Jabiru mycteria	Jabiru
Ciconia (= Euxenura) maguari	Maguari Stork

Family Balaenicipidae (Shoebills) 1 species

OLD WORLD

	<i>Common Name</i>
Balaeniceps rex	Shoebill

Sources

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Peters, J. (1931). *Check-List of Birds of the World*.

* Ramo, C., and B. Busto (in press). *Son Eudocimus ruber y E. albus* distintas especies? *Donana Acta Vertebrata*.

communications: Dr. David Wells, Ben King, Bernard Schmitt.

** although considered subspecies by Kahl (in Mayr and Cottrell, 1979), various scientists feel these birds are distinct enough in ecology and behavior to be considered as true species.

Zoogeographical Distribution of Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills

Ibises and Spoonbills

Storks

Nearctic

American White Ibis
Glossy Ibis
White-faced Ibis
Roseate Spoonbill

American Wood Stork

Neotropical

American White Ibis
Scarlet Ibis
Glossy Ibis
White-faced Ibis
Puna Ibis
Green Ibis
Plumbeous Ibis
Buff-necked Ibis
Black-faced Ibis
Puna Buff-necked Ibis
Whispering Ibis
Sharp-tailed Ibis
Roseate Spoonbill

American Wood Stork
Jabiru
Maguari Stork

Palaearctic

Glossy Ibis
Waldrapp
Japanese Crested Ibis
European Spoonbill

European White Stork
Black Stork
Eastern White Stork

Ethiopian

Sacred Ibis
Wattled Ibis
Hadedah
Olive Ibis
Spotted-breasted Ibis
Madagascar Crested Ibis
Bald Ibis
African Spoonbill
(White Spoonbill-migrant)

Yellow-billed Stork
African Open-billed Stork
Abdim's Stork
White-necked Stork
Saddle-billed Stork
Marabou
(European White Stork-migrant)
(Black Stork-migrant)

Oriental

Black-headed Ibis
Indian Black Ibis
White-shouldered Ibis
Giant Ibis
Glossy Ibis
Black-faced Spoonbill
White Spoonbill

Indian Painted Stork
Milky Stork
Asian Open-billed Stork
Wooly-necked Stork
Storm's Stork
Black-necked Stork
Lesser Adjutant
Greater Adjutant
(Black Stork-migrant)
(Eastern White Stork-migrant)

Australian

Australian White Ibis
Straw-necked Ibis
Glossy Ibis
Royal Spoonbill
Yellow-billed Spoonbill

Black-necked Stork