

# SIS Conservation

*Publication of the IUCN SSC Stork, Ibis and Spoonbill Specialist Group*

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***Editors-in-chief:* K.S. Gopi Sundar and Luis Santiago Cano Alonso**

***Guest Editor for Special Issue:* Simone Santoro**

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## Guest Editorial

**Simone SANTORO**

*Department of Molecular Biology and Biochemical Engineering, University Pablo de Olavide, Sevilla, Spain*  
*Corresponding author; e.mail: ssantoro@upo.es*

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My first meeting with the Glossy Ibis was pretty much random. I moved from Rome (Italy) to Seville (Spain) looking for a PhD project. By chance, I heard that Drs. Jordi Figuerola and Andy J. Green (Estación Biológica de Doñana- Agencia Estatal Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, EBD – CSIC) just opened the application for a PhD project on the population dynamics of Glossy Ibis. They were looking for a motivated student – I definitely was! – with some experience in statistical modelling of population dynamics. That was a hit for me since a few years earlier I spent part of my Bachelor thesis in the field marking and monitoring a population of roe deers. By then, I started to feel a real fascination for capture-mark-recapture models. That PhD proposal was therefore perfect to me and I was really lucky to find myself involved in a thesis on the Glossy Ibis, a bird, that being said, I had never seen before.

A few pairs of Glossy Ibis started to breed in Doñana, a spectacular wetland and ornithological sanctuary in South Spain, in 1996 after almost a century of local extinction. Researchers from the EBD started immediately a monitoring program (based on counts, ringing and visual resightings of marked birds) which gave rise to an impressive database that is still growing just like the wintering and breeding population of the species made up of more than 8,000 pairs nowadays. These data were crucial to shed light on quite a few aspects related to the increase of the local population and the consequent spread of the species across the Mediterranean Basin and Western Europe.

During my PhD I was thrilled by the ecological plasticity of this species, the speed at which it

responds to adverse conditions (e.g. local droughts) and the impressive dispersal skills (e.g. 3-4 months old birds leaving Doñana and crossing the Atlantic Ocean to reach the Antilles). Still, although this is among the six most cosmopolitan landbird species in the world, with a distribution range covering five continents, we know very little about the processes that have determined such a lucky fate. Why has the Glossy Ibis not been attractive to researchers? The reason must be probably found in its reputation as a nomadic species, with a fluid dynamic based on some populations popping up here and there and others crashing and disappearing all of a sudden. These characteristics make the Glossy Ibis undoubtedly difficult to study but, at the same time, they also make it very emblematic of the complexity beyond population dynamics, especially in these times of global change. Why some species decline and others increase and spread? Why does a species increase here and decrease there? To be able to answer these questions we need to focus our effort not only on the endangered species but also on common and cosmopolitan species. Furthermore, we need to do that by adopting a holistic approach. This has been the main reason (and challenge) to move me and other people to organize a research network. By doing so, we expect to share information and gain an otherwise unachievable knowledge of its dynamic. Working towards synergic and enthusiastic networking, we finally organized the first international workshop on the Glossy Ibis in November 2017 hold at the Parque Nacional de Doñana. This workshop would have been impossible without the collaboration of the EBD (my deepest

gratitude goes to Dr Jordi Figuerola without whom the workshop would have not been possible) and the auspices of the Tour du Valat (thanks to Drs. Jocelyn Champagnon and Arnaud Béchet) and the IUCN SSC Stork Ibis and Spoonbill Specialist Group (SIS SG – thanks to Drs. Luis Santiago Cano and Gopi Sundar). That was the seed of the International Glossy Ibis Network (IGIN) that nowadays recruits about 50 researchers and technicians from 25 countries (Figure 1). Some of them were already involved in monitoring programs of the species, some others have started more recently. Many of the IGIN members

have worked in this special issue on the Glossy Ibis that I am pleased and honoured to announce as Guest Editor of SIS Cons, this brand-new publication born after the initiative of Drs. Luis Santiago Cano and Gopi Sundar, the tireless Co-chairs of SIS SG. I wish to acknowledge all the persons who have made this possible, thank you for tolerating my annoying insistence. It was worth the effort and I now feel really enthusiastic about the future of this research network that, no doubts, will surely unravel more secrets of this beautiful and captivating ibis.

**Figure 1. Map of the International Glossy Ibis Network (IGIN)**

