

from
the field

by Jack Clinton-Eitnrear
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Jabiru Stork

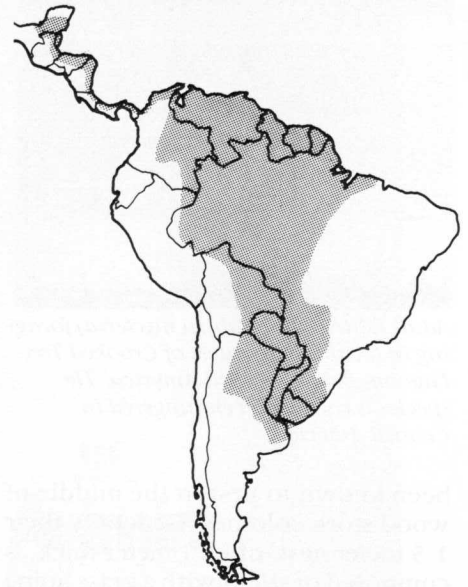
Scanning a rice field in Tabasco, Mexico my vision was attracted to a group of large wading birds in the distance. While a number of white wading species inhabit the area only one has a pink throat patch, the jabiru stork. Although I had frequently observed the bird in neighboring Belize, it was the first time that I had located it in Mexico, on their wintering grounds.


Breeding from Mexico and Belize south to Argentina (west of the Andes), the jabiru occasionally straggles as far

north as southern Texas. While frequently being found in association with wood storks, it is not considered closely related. Despite being geographically close, an analysis of the morphological and ethological characteristics of the various species of storks puts the jabiruo closer to the Old World *Ephippiorhynchus* genus. In total there are 19 species of storks, worldwide, in three families (including the hammerkop and shoebill). Only three inhabit the Western Hemisphere, the jabiru (*Jabiru mycteria*), wood stork (*Mycteria americana*) and the maguari stork (*Ciconia maguari*). Despite its wide range, the jabiru is considered a serious candidate for the current issue of the Red Data Book (I.C.B.P./I.U.C.N.) according to the author, Nigel Collar.

When only observed at a glance both sexes seem similar in appearance. Upon close examination, however, the female can be noted as having a thinner and more recurved bill as well as being generally smaller in size.

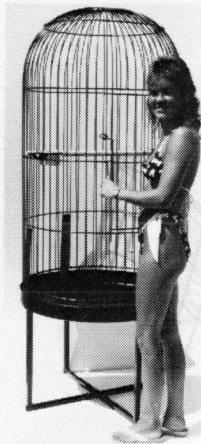
Mating for life, the jabiru has not developed the elaborate displays that its colonial relatives have in order to secure mates each season. While the pairs do not nest in colonies they have



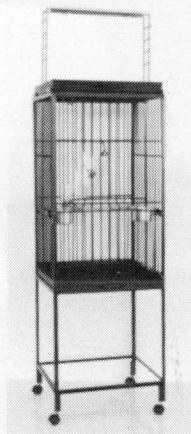
 Breeding range of the Jabiru stork (*Jabiru mycteria*)

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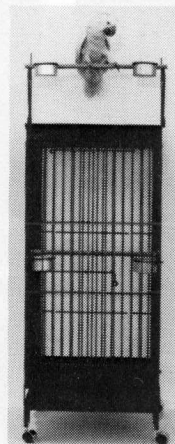
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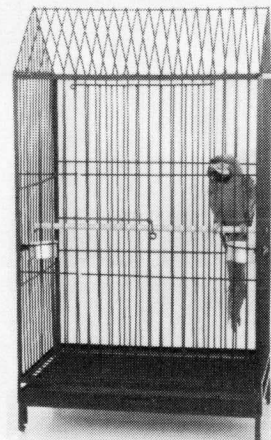
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Adult jabiru stork (*Jabiru mycteria*) foraging in the shallow waters of Crooked Tree Lagoon, Belize, Central America. The species is considered endangered in Central America.

been known to nest in the middle of wood stork colonies. Generally their 1.5 meter nest, often 1 meter thick, is composed of sticks with a grass lining and placed atop the tallest pine or palm tree in the area. Upon arriving at the nest the birds give the typical *Ciconiidae* greeting display. Facing each other with chattered bills they move their heads up and down and from side to side. Although its normal clutch size is composed of four eggs, occasionally

five are deposited.

Traveling over 550 kilometers in Campeche, Mexico, researchers from the Brehm Foundation counted ten adults with two nests in 1985. A similar effort in 1986 resulted in only four individuals being observed. In nearby Belize a 1987 census located ten adults, five young on nests and two eggs in one nest. A total of five nests were seen, two were not previously known. I can find little data on its status in Guatemala except that it is known to nest at Laguna Petexbatun in El Peten and is also observed on the Rio Motagua, Rio Dulce and on the floodplain of the Rio Polochic.

In captivity a recent questionnaire sent out by the Stork Interest Group documents 52 jabiru storks (9.11.32) are being held. Ten birds are being held in European zoos, ten in American facilities and thirty-one in Brazilian zoos. One bird was also located in an Asian zoo. While the species has yet to reproduce in captivity, success with the European white stork encourages

conservationists that similar success can be achieved with the jabiru.

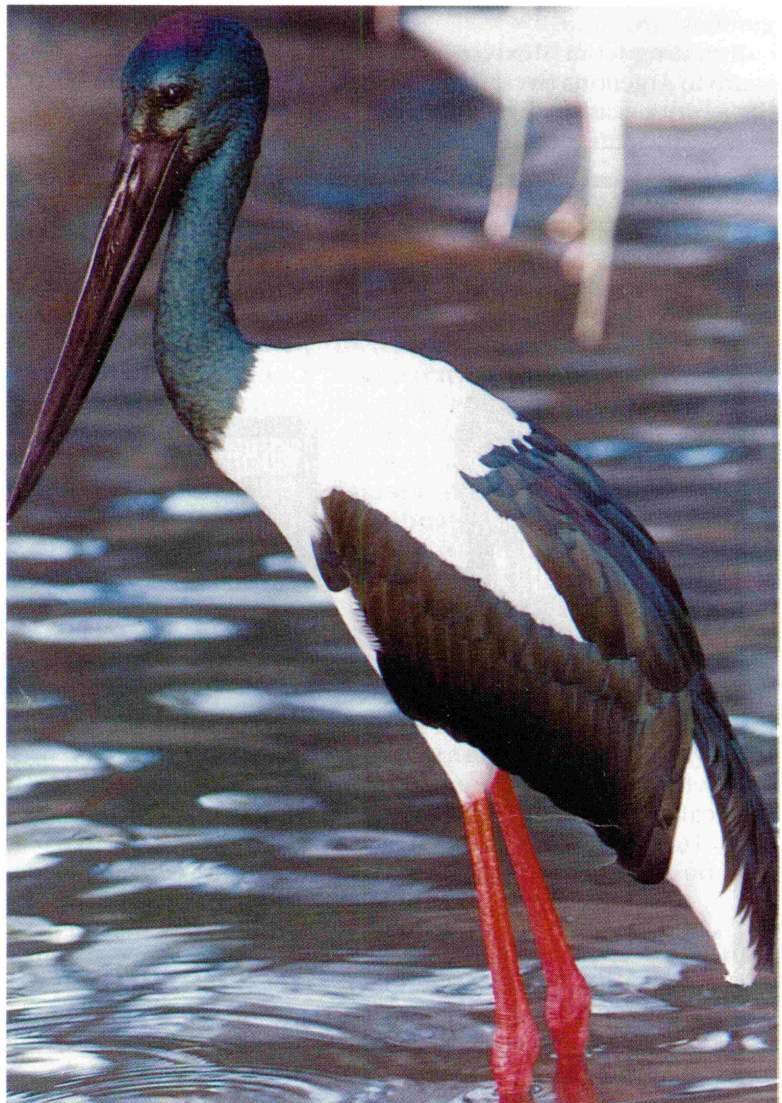
Hunting, human settlement and the destruction of marshes and mangrove forest all are contributing to the demise of this species. In Mexico its habitat is rapidly being converted into cattle pasture and rice plantations.

Feeding upon frogs, snakes, snails, insects and other invertebrates, the flock of jabiru storks observed in the Tabasco rice field seem unconcerned that their marsh had been converted into a rice plantation. Meanwhile the Brehm Fund is working with the various state and federal agencies to try to bring to a halt the unnecessary destruction of critical wetland habitat. In addition to the general loss of food items, the careless depositing of pesticide sacks and the rinsing of aircraft pesticide holding tanks into the rice field irrigation streams further threatens the future survival of this magnificent species. The species' only hope may well rest in the hands of those maintaining those 52 jabirus in captivity.

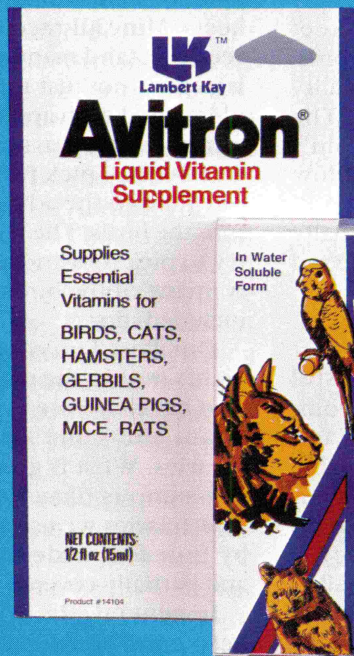


Jabiru stork (*Jabiru mycteria*) in a resting posture at the San Antonio Zoo. Less than a handful of specimens exist in zoological gardens within the hemisphere with no reproduction yet achieved.

The Old World black-necked stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) ranging from southern Asia, Indonesia to New Guinea and Australia, is actually the closest relative of the jabiru stork.



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