White Stork

Ciconia ciconia

Conservation Story

Conservation Status and Threats

- IUCN listed as Least Concern
- Current populations are believed to be increasing.
- Threats:
    - Historically, intense agriculture development and wetland destruction has caused white stork populations to decrease.
    - White storks are sometimes seen as pests, as they may build their large nests on top of roofs or chimneys.
        - Some organizations, such as the Polish Pro-Natura Society, remove completed nests and relocate them to areas more suitable for storks.
        - Some cultures place great value on the stork as a sign of good luck, and tolerate the nests despite any damage that they may cause..

What We Can Do

- By supporting the Maryland Zoo, you are supporting global wildlife conservation. The Maryland Zoo works with many organizations around the world to conserve species and ecosystems.
- There are many large and small changes we can make to our daily lives to support wildlife here in Maryland and around the world. Some examples are listed below.
    - Make environmentally responsible lifestyle decisions to help conserve habitat.
        - Reduce litter and pollution by participating in community cleanups, recycling, and taking advantage of reusable items.
        - Use pesticides and other hazardous materials sparingly and dispose of them properly to ensure that they do not leach into natural ecosystems.
        - Create habitat for local wildlife by planting native plants and building nest boxes for helpful animals such as bees, bats, and owls.
- Some animals never make good pets. While all pets require a great deal of responsibility, exotic pets come with unique challenges and specific care requirements. If you are considering an exotic species as a pet, consider the following:
    - Make sure you are purchasing an animal from a responsible breeder and not purchasing a wild-caught individual.
    - Make sure you know how to properly care for any animal before you decide to bring a pet into your home.

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In the Wild

Description

- Size:
  - Length: 3.25-3.75 ft
  - Wingspan: 6-6.5 ft
- Weight: 5-9.5 pounds
- Physical Description:
  - Large wading birds with long, narrow, sharp beaks
  - Long, thin legs account for half of their height
  - Mostly white with black primary feathers
  - Orange beak and legs
- Sexual dimorphism: Males are slightly larger

Habitat and Range

- Range: Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Spain
  - Winters in southern portions of range
  - Habitat: Savannah, grasslands, wetlands, agricultural land

Diet

- Carnivorous: Eats fish, reptiles, aquatic invertebrates, insects and small mammals

Adaptations

- Long legs allow wading birds to walk among the reeds while still maintaining a high vantage point from which to see prey.
- Their long, pointed beak is ideal for spearing and catching prey.
- Having long legs and a relatively small wingspan make flying difficult for white storks. To migrate, white storks rely on thermal updrafts to maintain altitude when flying.

Social Structure

- Typically live in loose groups of up to 50 individuals during the summer
- Form large, nomadic flocks in winter
- Migrate in large groups of hundreds and thousands
- Rarely territorial
- Communicate by bill clattering

Lifespan/Life Cycle

- Median life expectancy:
  - Female: 13.9 years
  - Male: 17.6 years
- Maximum longevity: Up to 35 years

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Ecosystem relationships

- Predators:
  - Adult white storks have few predators
  - Nestlings and fledglings eaten by hawks and eagles
  - Nests are too high above the ground for terrestrial predators
- Importance:
  - Aid in regulation of small aquatic species
  - Are a food source for birds of prey

Reproduction

- Breeding Season: March to April
- Behavior:
  - Seasonally monogamous
  - Males arrive to nesting grounds first
  - Males typically accept the first mate to approach their nesting site
  - Some pairs reform year to year due to breeding site preference
  - Courtship displays include: posturing, head and wing movements, and bill clattering
  - Construct large nests up to 6 feet wide and 9 feet deep
  - Nests constructed high off the ground
- Incubation: 5 weeks
- Clutch Size: 3-5 eggs
- Maturation:
  - Both parents feed and protect the chicks for about 9 weeks
  - Reach sexual maturity at 4 years

Activity

- Diurnal

Other "Fun Facts"

- White storks are seen as good luck in many cultures, and are believed to be harbingers of human babies.
- Due to their cultural popularity, efforts to conserve white storks can be traced back to before World War II.
- Storks are not very vocal, instead they communicate in other ways, such as clattering their bills.

At the Zoo

- The Zoo currently has 2 white storks, 1 female and 1 male both off exhibit
  - One in holding area behind Sitatunga Yard (visible from exhibit), male Mr. Storky

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Additional Resources and References:

- Animal Diversity Web: http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Ciconia_ciconia/
- ARKive: http://www.arkive.org/white-stork/ciconia-ciconia/
- "Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North America." Volume I, p 328-335
- IUCN Redlist of Threatened Species: http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/22697691/0