



## Abdim's Stork Kleinswartooievaar

*Ciconia abdimii*

Abdim's Stork is a nonbreeding, trans-equatorial, intra-African migrant to southern Africa. It breeds north of the equator (Kahl 1971b), mainly in the northern semi-arid tropics (Hancock *et al.* 1992) and spends the austral summer mainly in southern Africa. It occurs widely in the region, with the exception of most of the Cape Province, KwaZulu-Natal and southern Namibia. It is common to abundant throughout its range, at times gathering in groups of thousands at feeding sites (Hancock *et al.* 1992). In southern Africa it is most frequently encountered during the summer wet season in the inland areas of the Free State and Transvaal, and in Botswana, Zimbabwe and northern Namibia (Hancock *et al.* 1992). It is gregarious, usually in groups of a few tens of individuals, and sometimes in enormous flocks of up to 10 000 birds, especially during migration, or when following rain fronts, termite emergences and locust swarms. While foraging, it sometimes associates with the White Stork *C. ciconia*.

It can be confused with the Black Stork *C. nigra* (Hancock *et al.* 1992). However, because of size and plumage differences, and this species' migratory and gregarious habits, it is unlikely that misidentification would have occurred frequently.

**Habitat:** It forages on land and only seldom in water. It is most commonly found in grasslands, pastures and cultivated fields (Hancock *et al.* 1992). The highest reporting rates were in vegetation types in Zimbabwe, namely Miombo and the Eastern Zimbabwe Highlands, although its occurrence is most frequently associated with cleared areas within these biomes.

**Movements:** Its migratory routes and times of movement between the northern and southern hemisphere are well recorded (Hancock *et al.* 1992). The atlas data indicate that it

starts arriving in southern Africa in October to coincide with the early-summer rains, with peak arrival November–December (Taylor 1979; Irwin 1981; Herremans 1994d). Peak presence is November–February in Zimbabwe, and January–March further west and south. Local movements occur in southern Africa throughout the summer in response to temporally and spatially abundant supplies of food, such as locust swarms, termite emergences and outbreaks of insects and other prey; these in turn are related to rainfall events. Its seasonal north–south movements ensure that it rarely spends much time in dry conditions.

The gradual decrease in reporting rates in all Zones, February–May, indicates a protracted departure of flocks northwards, with reporting rates decreasing most rapidly during March and early April (Taylor 1979; Irwin 1981; Herremans 1994d). One individual ringed near Harare (1731CC) as an adult in January was recovered in Cameroon, 3000 km away, three months later (SAFRING); another adult ringed at the same place, also in January, was reported seven years later in February in the Upper Uele, Zaire (Irwin 1981). Occasionally birds remain in southern Africa during the austral winter (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Herremans 1994d).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** The historical distribution is probably similar to the present, although habitat degradation, as a result of urban development and agricultural activities, such as maize farming, has reduced the available area of natural grassland habitat. The low reporting rates in southern areas of the Transvaal and Free State may support this suggestion. In Namibia, this species is likely to have been negatively impacted by rangeland degradation through overgrazing and bush encroachment (C.J. Brown *in litt.*). In other areas, clearing of woodland for arable land has provided new feeding grounds.

The population is probably stable (Brown *et al.* 1982) but, through the control of its principal food source, locusts, Abdim's Stork may be affected either directly by poisoning or indirectly by a reduction in the availability of food.

M.D. Anderson

Recorded in 1153 grid cells, 25.4%  
Total number of records: 5048  
Mean reporting rate for range: 8.3%

### Reporting rates for vegetation types



