



Saddlebilled Stork

Saalbekooievaar

Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis

This Afrotropical stork is confined largely to the north-eastern parts of southern Africa in Zimbabwe, northern and northeastern Botswana, and the Caprivi Strip, with scattered records for other northern and central parts of Namibia. In South Africa the Saddlebilled Stork occurs principally in the northeastern lowveld areas of the Transvaal, extending south to Swaziland and northeastern KwaZulu-Natal, where breeding has occasionally been reported (Berruti *et al.* 1977; McLean 1986).

Published estimates of population sizes are *c.* 500 pairs in Zimbabwe (Coulter 1992), *c.* 50–100 pairs in South Africa (Brooke 1984b; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), and four birds in Swaziland (Parker 1994). The estimate for Zimbabwe is probably too high; Wood & Tree (1992) found *c.* 20 pairs along 256 km of the Zambezi River in prime habitat below Kariba Dam.

Its large size and contrasting black-and-white plumage render it conspicuous and unmistakable. The scattered records in the Free State and Cape Province, as well as those for arid central Namibia and southeastern Botswana, indicate wide-scale vagrancy, of which further examples are found in the literature (e.g. Quinton 1956; Skead 1967b; Edwards 1969; Mills 1976).

Habitat: It is found in various aquatic habitats in open or semi-arid country, favouring rivers, freshwater and alkaline lakes, marshes and floodplains (Hancock *et al.* 1992). Highest reporting rates were in the Okavango, and in Mopane with its many associated pans.

Movements: The models show considerable scatter, with an apparent decline in reporting rates during midsummer

(December–February). These seasonal fluctuations are likely to be related to changes in behaviour and conspicuousness with breeding and dispersal to ephemeral wetlands. The species appears to be resident throughout its southern African range.

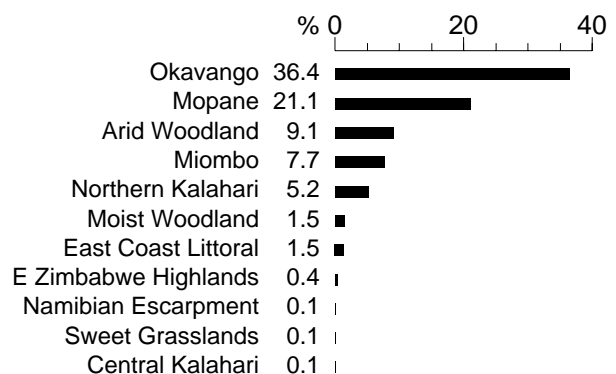
Breeding: Breeding records came from all Zones in which it occurred. Evidence of breeding activity was recorded almost throughout the year, though with distinct bimodality in Zone 6. The peak in autumn could follow from nestbuilding and pre-laying displays, while subsequent incubating birds and unattended small chicks are often not visible from the ground owing to the height (20–30 m) and the large size (up to 2 m in diameter) of the nest, and the depth of the central depression (Hancock *et al.* 1992). The second peak in spring could then be attributed to the presence of large nestlings, and fledglings which still give begging displays and are fed by the parents October–December (Hancock *et al.* 1992). Egglaying has been recorded January–August, peaking February–March in Zimbabwe and Botswana, and April–June in the Transvaal (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Brown & Clinning *in press*; N.J. Skinner *in litt.*)

Historical distribution and conservation: The historical distribution has not been specifically documented, although Brooke (1984b) reviewed the available information and showed a South African distribution similar to the current range. The Saddlebilled Stork was not included in the African Red Data book by Collar *et al.* (1994), but it is considered 'rare' in South Africa (Brooke 1984b). Reviewing the conservation status of the world's stork species, Luthin (1987) considered that the Saddlebill Stork requires special attention because of its sensitivity to habitat loss and disturbance. The extensive wetland habitats on which it depends are under growing human pressure. The impoundment of rivers, the extraction of water for irrigation and domestic use, and the degradation of floodplains due to increasing numbers of cattle are the most important factors in this regard. However, on the Zimbabwean plateau, numbers may have increased with the construction of large impoundments (A.J. Tree *in litt.*).

G.A. Benn

Recorded in 520 grid cells, 11.5%
Total number of records: 4421
Mean reporting rate for range: 15.9%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in Southern Kalahari, Sour Grasslands, Mixed Grasslands, Nama Karoo and Grassy Karoo.

