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# Book reviews

Edited by P. Dann

## STORKS, IBISES AND SPOONBILLS OF THE WORLD

by James A. Hancock, James A. Kushlan and M. Philip Kahl

1992 Academic Press, London. Pp. 385, colour plates 50, many colour photographs, maps, 250 x 310 mm., price \$139.

Messrs Hancock, Kushlan and Kahl are well known for their extensive and intensive studies of the large wading birds of the Order Ciconiiformes. The first two authored *The Herons Handbook* (1984. Croom Helm, London) and all three researchers have published in the scientific literature on the subjects of this handsome book — the storks, ibises and spoonbills. The authors have seen most of the species in the wild and have studied one form or another over the past three decades. The purpose of this book was to present all available information on these birds in order to increase interest in their study. Ultimately, the authors hope that knowledge of these fascinating, mostly elegant and sometimes flamboyant species will ensure the conservation of the birds and their wetland habitats.

The form and quality of this book are similar to *The Herons Handbook*. The book opens with overview chapters on the classification, conservation, reproduction and feeding biology of the subject species including colour photographs. Then follows a section for each of the 49 species described; all sections cover nomenclature, identification, distribution and population, ecology, breeding, taxonomy, conservation and include a colour plate of the bird and a distribution map. Measurements of all species and a 4000 record bibliography, the latter provided by the ICBP Working Group on

Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills, complete the work.

Based on several of the species that I know well, the text is accurate and representative of the key aspects of the biology of these species. The colour photographs were mostly taken by Phil Kahl and show his excellent photographic skills. The colour plates, painted by Alan Harris and Davis Quinn, are also excellent and display characteristic features and postures of the birds (although it is a pity that the Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* was not depicted with an inflated gular sac — quite a bizarre structure — no doubt indicating that most birds were painted from skins). The photographs and plates have been reproduced well and I did not find any editorial errors. The very high standard of this monograph clearly reflects the expert and sympathetic understanding that the authors have for these birds as well as the high professional standards for which they are known.

The authors point out that the members of the Order Ciconiiformes are not exempted from threats to their conservation status and indeed some of the lesser known forms are under threat of extinction. Even the ubiquitous Sacred Ibis has been lost from its former range in Egypt through the usual range of pressures caused by humans. Their calls for protection and wise management of wetlands are exemplified throughout this book. I recommend this work as the best available on the large wading birds and, in company with *The Herons Handbook*, the authors have this group of birds stitched-up!

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