

WOOD STORKS IN WAYNE COUNTY NEW YORK AUG – SEPT 2001

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Wood Storks (*Mycteria americana*) are rare fall vagrants in New York State with about 20 records. The coastal records have included several flocks ranging in size from 10 to 15. All inland records have been single birds (Levine 1998) so when 16 showed up in western New York this past summer, it was an unusual event that drew dozens of birders, both from this area and from all over the state.

Thirteen storks were first reported by Fay Sedore on 15 Aug 2001 in a small pond at the junction of Clyde-Hunts Corners Rd. and Daboll Rd, Clyde, Wayne County. Over the course of the next month, they were seen in varying numbers at four ponds in the Clyde area and once in Rochester, NY. The last sighting was by Kevin Scott and included 14 birds at a pond on the William Harper Farm on Welch Rd Extension in Clyde on 10 Sep 2001. According to reports, all the storks seen during this period were immatures.

Their behavior was carefully observed at the home of Sue and Jeff Dapolito who live in the town of Clyde. The Dapolito's have a large lot with a small pond in their backyard. When first observed at their pond, the birds would come daily arriving in the morning, as early as 7 am. They would remain at the pond from four to seven hours. When feeding, they would catch mostly bullheads, but also frogs. One stork was observed catching and eating a ten-inch bullhead but most prey fish were about four inches long.

In the Clyde area, they were seen at four small ponds (20 to 60 feet in diameter) surrounded by a muddy edge and lined at least on one side with trees or tall bushes. After feeding, they would roost on the pond edge or in a tree. Initially, they would come to the same pond daily, then after four to seven days, sporadically. It is most likely that as the fish population of the pond decreased, they looked for better locations. Wood Storks normally rely on dense populations of prey in seasonally drying wetland ponds and require about one pound of food per day (Wolkomir 2001).

The whereabouts of every bird could not be accounted for on a daily basis. The highest count of storks was 16, recorded on both 29 Aug and 1 Sep. There was speculation that the birds were using a large private nature reserve in the Clyde area as a place to feed and roost at night but there was no confirmation. Except for one account, there is no knowledge of where they spent the nights.

On the evening of 28 Aug, John Newhouse and Dave Tetlow saw three Wood Storks land in Cranberry Pond in Rochester, about 35 miles west of Clyde. The next morning, a number of birders saw these birds leave this pond at 9:30 am. The three storks were soaring and heading east over Badgerow Park in Rochester at 10:20 am. Cranberry Pond is just east of Braddock Bay and, by comparison, is very large and loaded with emergent vegetation and tall shrubs, a habitat unlike those the birds were typically using for feeding.

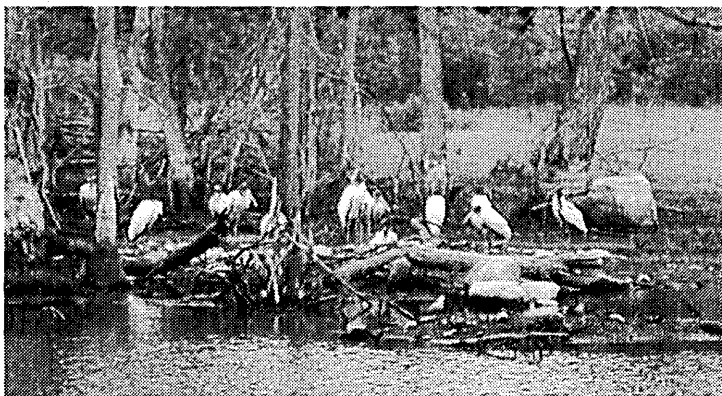
Late this summer, post-breeding storks were reported in Illinois, Ontario and in Pennsylvania. A single immature appeared in Lombard, Illinois and was being treated for dehydration, weight loss and parasites, this past August (Chase and Yates 2001) but this bird later died. Three Wood Storks were found on Pelee Island in Lake Erie on 9 Aug. They remained until 22 Sep. Two immature storks were found in Pennsylvania, one near Meadville, Pa. from 18 to 31 Aug, and the other near Littestown, Pa. from 19 Aug to 3 Sep.

The Wood Stork population has plummeted from about 60,000 in 1930 to about 10,000 today. The decline is attributed to poor reproduction due to lack of adequate food supply. The highest numbers bred in Florida but a five-year drought has caused the birds to breed further north in the cypress swamps of Georgia and South Carolina. Larry Bryan, chief Wood Stork researcher at the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, monitors this species in the US. The US breeding population is confined to Florida, Georgia and South Carolina. He annually surveys 90 nesting colonies in Florida and counted 418 nests in 2001 compared with 7000 in 1999 (Slay and Bryan 2001). This large decrease is attributed to drought.

It is most likely that the juvenile Wood Storks seen in Clyde moved north in search of better feeding locations. During the past year there was a large influx of Wood Storks in Louisiana and Arkansas, believed to be birds of the Mexican population that came north for the same reason.

Literature Cited

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