

# THE WOOD STORK IN SOUTH CAROLINA, A REVIEW

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Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) populations have declined in recent years (Ogden 1974) as a result of drought and human modification of nesting and feeding areas. The current population is estimated at less than 15-20% of the more than 100,000 birds that bred in Florida, and to a lesser extent in swamps of the Gulf and southern Atlantic coasts at the turn of the century (Wexler 1976). The following account traces the status of the species primarily in South Carolina; North Carolina records are also included.

The status of the Wood Stork in South Carolina is somewhat confused due to uneven reporting of observations. Historically, Wayne (1910) reported thousands of juveniles in Copahee Sound near his Mt. Pleasant, S.C., home every year in late summer. Sprunt and Chamberlain (1970) wrote in 1949 that the species was "really abundant in typical nesting localities in the midst of the breeding season . . . ." Since the time of that writing, the species has apparently decreased in abundance. Recent records, although sporadic, indicate that the species continues to persist in the state. At least one record exists from the Carolinas for 24 of the past 30 years (Fig. 1). These recent data indicate that the species probably is a permanent resident in small numbers in South Carolina, reaching lowest numbers in winter and increasing to peak abundance in mid- and late summer. The summer peak is in large part due to northward movements of storks out of Florida in May and June and as early as April in years when nesting colonies in that state fail (J.C. Ogden, pers. com.).

The breeding status is a different and disputed matter, however. Wayne (1910) reports visiting a breeding colony in Caw Caw Swamp, Colleton County, on 1 June 1885, although he took no eggs. Caw Caw is located today in Charleston County as a result of boundary changes made in 1911 (Glover 1962). Alexander Sprunt Jr. and others found 10 stork nests in the Penny Dam Reserve on the Fairlawn Plantation, Charleston County, on 5 June 1928 (from A. Sprunt Jr., field notes, fide J.C. Ogden, pers. com.). Several instances of adult birds carrying sticks have since been observed (Sprunt and Chamberlain 1970) although no nest has been found. The A.O.U. Checklist (1957) lists the species as a probable breeder in South Carolina, but Kahl (1964) makes no mention of that. During fieldwork in April and May 1976, Lewis Wright and I were able to make several observations which add support to the belief that Wood Storks may continue to nest in South Carolina.

On 23 April 1976 at 0700, we encountered a large group of wading birds in Penny Dam Reserve. The mixed foraging flock was composed of 100 White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*), 15-20 Great Egrets (*Egretta alba*), four Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*), and more than 10 Wood Storks. The birds were actively foraging in one of the channels that drain this cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) backwater. Water levels in the swamp were falling rapidly as a result of the longest drought in the history of the county, concentrating fish into the channels. Our approach startled some of the birds, and the wingbeats of the storks were plainly audible as they departed through the cypresses.

Later that same morning, at 0735, we were again attracted by the sounds of stork wings, several hundred feet away from the first observation site. This time the sounds came from the trees. From a distance of 100 feet we observed one individual standing on a cypress limb 20 feet up, rhythmically raising and lowering its head with a stick in its bill, putting the stick between its feet. Twenty feet farther away, about 25 feet up, another pair of storks was observed to copulate, the male standing on the female's back, flapping his wings loudly. When the copulation was finished both birds appeared to preen themselves. The latter behavior agrees closely with Kahl's (1972) description of Copulation Clattering display. Realizing that we had found nesting storks and wishing not to disturb them, we left the area.

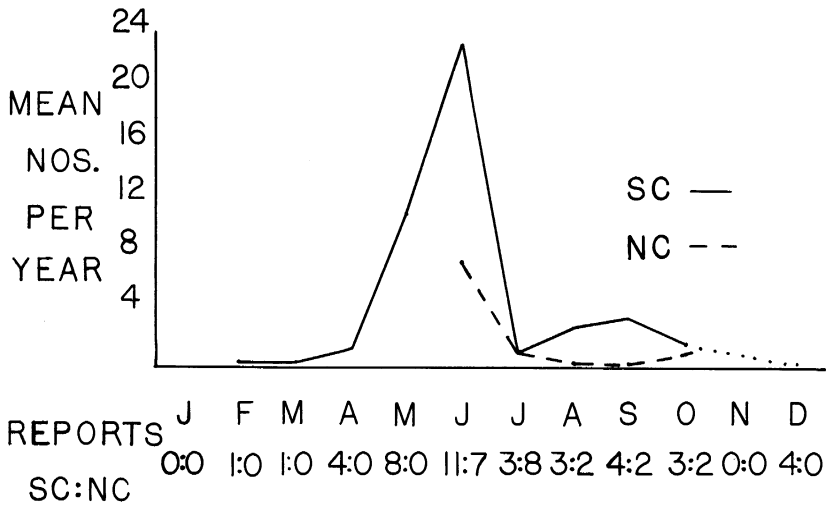


Fig. 1. Monthly occurrence of Wood Storks in the Carolinas, 1947-1976. Summary of records appearing in the *Chat* since the first edition of Sprunt and Chamberlain (1970) was published in 1949. All years save 1947, 1949, 1952, 1966, 1969, 1973 are represented in the data set for at least one of the states. "Reports" lists the total number of records by state by month. Four North Carolina records, two July and one each October and November (Pearson et al. 1959) are omitted because no numbers were given.

We returned on the afternoon of 14 May with John Cely and Beth Wright to determine the status of the nesting effort. Unfortunately, the birds had quit nesting. Water levels had receded further still despite rains early in May, and our thorough search failed to find evidence of nests. Approximately 25-30 storks were observed foraging in another part of the backwater, near a rookery of herons, egrets, and Anhingas (*Anhinga anhinga*). Earlier that day the Wrights had seen eight storks flying over Mayrant's Backwater, a mile to the NE. We were also unsuccessful during a final visit to the rookery in the Reserve on 19 May. Species nesting in the rookery were Anhinga, Great Blue Heron, Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*), Great Egret, and Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*).

On 18 May we found another flock of 30 storks at Cat Island Plantation, in the Santee delta, Georgetown County, S.C. Between 27 May and 4 June, Ogden (pers. com.) found 230 storks in Charleston County, in addition to those mentioned above, during searches sponsored by the National Audubon Society.

Wood Storks' dependence upon highly specific conditions of water level (Kahl 1964) for feeding and nesting indicates that the species' status is highly volatile and uncertain. Ogden (1973, 1974) suggests that careful records be kept of known stork populations in Florida. Any and all observations of the species in the Carolinas are important as well. I suggest that all observations of Wood Storks in the Carolinas be reported to the compiler of the "Briefs for the Files" so he will be able to summarize the status of this species regularly and accurately in his column in *Chat*.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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debted to Dr. Ritchie Belser and Mr. Ben Willie Richardson for allowing access to Fairlawn and to Cat Island, respectively. E.B. Chamberlain, C.W. Helms, M.P. Kahl, and J.C. Ogden have made useful comments on the manuscript.

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# Roundtable

... with Louis C. Fink

## Memorial for Tom Rial

The Georgia Ornithological Society is accepting contributions for a memorial to honor Tom Rial. Checks should be sent to John Swiderski, P.O. Box 38214, Atlanta, Georgia 30334. Tom's family will be notified of each contribution.

## Plagiarism Among the Naturalists

Dr. and Mrs. Marcus B. Simpson Jr. published an article in the *North Carolina Historical Review*, Winter 1977 issue. Entitled, "The Reverend John Clayton's Letters to the Royal Society of London, 1693-1694: An Important Source for Dr. John Brickell's *Natural History of North Carolina, 1737*," the article cites many cases in which Brickell copied Clayton's descriptions, without giving credit. The Rev. Mr. Clayton made his original observations in Virginia, but Dr. Brickell set them down as pertaining to North Carolina. The article makes for fascinating reading. I had the privilege of recording it on tape for the N.C. Library for the Blind.

## Request for Information

As regional reporter for region 4 (Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina) of the Colonial Waterbird Group, I am compiling a list of individuals researching any aspect of the biology of colonial water birds (gulls, terns, shorebirds, herons, ibis, etc.). Investigators are asked to send their names, addresses, and a short detailed description of past, current, or future research to James A. Rodgers Jr., Department of Biology, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida 33620.