



Marabou Stork

Ciconiiformes
Family: Ciconiidae
Genus: *Leptoptilos*
Species: *crumeniferus*



Range: Tropical Africa

Habitat: Savanna, grasslands, riverbanks, lakeshores, rare in forest or desert. Typically in, around fishing villages and rubbish sites and in E. and S. Africa commonly found around carcasses with other scavengers.

Niche: Diurnal, terrestrial, carnivorous

Wild diet: Carrion, termites, small mammals, fish, frogs, young crocodiles and birds.

Zoo diet: Ratite diet and Feline diet (both are commercially made, fortified meat based diets), mice and small rats.

Life Span: (Wild) 25+ years
(Captivity) 41+ years

Sexual dimorphism: Male slightly larger than female.

Location in SF Zoo: African Savannah.

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

The wings, tail and back are slate gray with green highlights. Primary coverts are white producing “stripes” on wings at rest. Collare and underparts are white. The head and neck are naked with wispy feathers and dull pink to brown, as is the bill. The neck is thick and the bill is heavy, straight and sharp pointed. There is red around the eyes. There is naked skin-covered, red/pink pouch, hanging a foot or more from the throat that is part of the respiratory system and is used in displays and as a cooling mechanism. The legs are dark gray with short feet and stubby toes, webbed at the base and blunt claws. Long legs allow the Marabou to wade in deeper water and, together with a longer neck, give a greater reach in securing prey especially around carcasses.

Weight: 8 ½ - 16 lbs

Length: 44 – 60” inches

Wing span: 7 - 9 ft

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Not threatened, widespread in Sub Saharan Africa but vulnerable to habitat loss through water degradation. The population appears to be increasing, probably due to the ability to exploit ever-increasing amounts of garbage dumped by humans.

MARABOU STORK

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

The greatest variety in vocalizations seems to belong to the marabou. They can moo, whine, whistle and hiccup during breeding and threat displays as well as the usual bill clattering of the storks who do not possess a voicebox and are mute.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Sexual displays include a variety of elaborate postured and stylized dancing or walking during which the bill is often rattled or clattered. The bare skin of the head and neck take on much more vivid colors during courtship make the display more spectacular. Marabou nest in colonies of 20-60 pairs up to several thousand and may use the same colony site for over 50 years. The nests are in trees on a platform made of sticks with the male gathering the materials and the female arranging them. The 2-3 eggs are chalky white and incubation is 29-31 days. Both parents incubate the eggs and take part in feeding and carrying food to the altricial young. The food is regurgitated into the nest, where, by 2 weeks of age, the chicks need little help to dispose of it. The chicks fledge at 95-115 days and reach sexual maturity at about 4 years.

Incubation:	29 - 31 days	Sexual Maturity:	~ 4 years
# of Eggs:	2 - 3	Fledging:	95 - 115 days

MISCELLANEOUS

In flight, the neck is retracted and the legs are stretched straight out. Wing flapping is alternated with soaring on thermals. They are partly migratory but mainly nomadic birds. They are attracted from great distances to grass fires, where they march along the fire front eating fleeing insects and mammals.

Storks have been around for 28-36 million years. The Marabou is the largest and probably most resembles its ancestral progenitors. The wingspan is only slightly exceeded by two condors and the largest of the albatross.

Marabou legs are usually white with excrement, which when dried helps keep the bird cool.

Their fluffy white undertail feathers are widely used in hat-making and fishing lure production.

Sources:

Handbook of Birds of the World, Vol 1 © 1992 p.436-465 by Andrew Elliott
Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills of the World © 1992 by J.A. Hancock, J.A. Kushlan and M.P. Kahl
National Audubon Society Field Guide to African Wildlife © 1995 by Alfred A. Knopf

Created 5/2004, Updated 7/2011