

JABIRU STORK IN OKLAHOMA

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AT about 0900 on the morning of 28 July 1973, while we were observing Little Blue Herons (*Florida caerulea*), Snowy Egrets (*Egretta thula*), Great Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*), and Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*) in a marshy field just south of the town of Bixby, Tulsa County, northeastern Oklahoma, a heavy-bodied, long-legged, white bird ambled out from a group of trees. It was so very big that it made the Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets look small. Our binoculars brought the surprising creature, now in the open in bright sunshine and only a hundred yards away, into sharp focus. It had a thick, nearly foot-long bill that seemed to turn up at the end. Its legs were the same dark gray as the bill. Its naked looking head and neck were gray-black except for a noticeable red band at the base of the neck. The plumage of its wings and body was dingy white. It had to be a stork, we reasoned, but since its bill was not decurved and its wings were wholly without black, it could not be a Wood



JABIRU STORK

An immature bird photographed by Robert S. Farris on 4 August 1973 in a rain-soaked field just south of Bixby, Tulsa County, northeastern Oklahoma. Note the huge bill, bold neck-band, and slightly mottled plumage.

Stork (*Mycteria americana*), a species known to visit Oklahoma occasionally.

A telephone call quickly brought Eleanor Sieg, Herbert Keating, his wife Polly, four telescopes (20- to 50-power), and three field guides. A sense of frustration gripped us all until Herbert Keating found the right picture on Plate 2 of "A field guide to the birds of Mexico and Central America" by L. Irby Davis (1972). Our bird was a Jabiru Stork (*Jabiru mycteria*), a species whose range extends normally from "southern Mexico through Central America and South America to Argentina" (Friedmann, Griscom, and Moore, 1950, Distributional check-list of the birds of Mexico, Pt. 1: 35).

The telescopes showed the white plumage of the bird to be tinged with brown, especially on the breast. They also made clear that there was dingy white plumage on the back of the head. We decided that the bird was immature, probably less than a year old. For an hour it remained within a space about two yards square; then, spreading its wide wings, it flew easily over a barbed wire fence into the adjoining field. For two more hours we watched it as it walked about, preened itself, stretched its long neck until it stood nearly five feet tall, then settled back into the typical "siesta" pose with foot drawn up and bill resting on breast.

Word spread quickly through the Tulsa Audubon Society and to bird observers in Bartlesville and Muskogee. The Jabiru was under observation several times a day from 28 July through 9 August; it was photographed repeatedly by six people and watched by at least 35 others from time to time. The highway close by became such a meeting place that local people joined the watch. The owner of the field said she had seen the big bird several days before we found it. One man said that he had first noticed it the day after a heavy rain.

The year 1973 was one of unusually severe and frequent rain storms in Oklahoma. According to U.S. Weather Bureau reports, Tulsa had a heavy rain on 14 July, but the heaviest rains fell from 23 to 25 July, when the meeting of a warm front from the south and a cold front from the west produced storm conditions — flash floods, gusty winds, lightning-caused fires — that were especially severe in southeastern Tulsa County. Twice as much rain as usual fell there in July, leaving certain pecan orchards, meadows, and tree-bordered cultivated fields 3 miles south of the Arkansas River — the area in which we found the Jabiru — with much casual water in the form of ponds, brimming ditches, and marshy places.

To this water-soaked area we returned on 29 July to observe the Jabiru. The bird's great size, seven-foot wingspread, long neck, and massive bill again impressed us. In the bright sunshine its white plumage fairly shone. It was feeding with egrets and other herons but seemed completely indifferent to them, walking along opening and closing its heavy mandibles rapidly while pushing them through the water, sometimes probing the bottom or the partly submerged

vegetation with them. We watched it catch a fish 8 or 10 inches long crosswise in its bill. The fish got away when the stork attempted to turn it for swallowing. With neck outstretched and bill open the great bird chased the fish in the shallow water — but in vain. We did, however, see it capture and swallow several somewhat smaller fish.

Only one step forward was required when the Jabiru launched itself into flight. Once off the ground, it rose abruptly. Its wingbeats were regular and not very rapid. The long neck, heavy bill, and long legs were conspicuous as it made off. It flew a hundred yards or so, circled, and returned, gliding down to a spot not far from that at which it had been feeding. When it flew off a second time, it vanished over the treetops. The consensus of those who had watched it flying was that there were no missing or clipped wing feathers or other indications of its having been in captivity.

For nine days the Jabiru was observed at this same place feeding, resting, and preening. Once it appeared to bathe by putting water on its feathers with its bill. At twilight, when all the herons flew away to roost, it continued to feed for a time then suddenly stopped, rested its bill on its breast, and went to sleep, standing there in the middle of the field where nothing could approach it without being observed. No one ever saw it in a tree or on a post.

On 5 August the Oklahoma City Zoo sent its Zoological Curator, Charles Wilson, to verify our identification and to capture the stork if possible. He and his wife Carole (in charge of feeding the five Jabirus then at the zoo) were amazed and excited by seeing this one in the wild in Oklahoma. After dark — there was a little moonlight — Charles Wilson and his brother Claude, who had come from Okmulgee, Oklahoma, to help, crept toward the bird with a net. No one knew for sure that the stork was asleep, though it remained motionless as the two men, keeping low, moved slowly forward. After about an hour and a half of watching through his 8 x 50 binocular, Richard Sherry of Tulsa reported that the bird was becoming nervous. Its would-be captors were now only about 12 yards away. The Jabiru, walking back and forth within an open area about two yards square, kept its head up and made a clacking noise with its bill. Then abruptly it flew up and away.

After being disturbed, the stork did not frequent this favorite spot any more, but the following evening John Tomer and his wife Pat discovered it in another wet field 4 miles due north, and on 7 August Bruce Reynolds and his wife Anne watched it there as, in a truly spectacular performance, it flew up, circled the the field, began to soar, rose higher and higher without moving its wings until almost out of sight, then returned to a lower level and flew off to the east. For two more days it visited this new field, though in so far as anyone could discover it did not sleep there. After 9 August it was not seen again.

The Oklahoma City Zoo got in touch with other zoos of the area to determine if the stork might have been "an escape." No one reported a lost Jabiru. Those who have seen or become interested in the Tulsa County bird are convinced that it was truly wild because first, it was in excellent condition, could fly well, and was quite capable of caring for itself; second, being a young bird, its wandering "out of range" in late summer was precisely what the young of many large wading birds customarily do after the breeding season; and third, unusual winds from the south in July might well have blown it farther and farther north. Finding sufficient food at various stops, it had survived though a long way from its normal habitat.

The Jabiru Stork is listed hypothetically in the AOU Check-list, the "record from Austin, Texas," published in 1867, being considered "unsatisfactory" (1957, p. 645). One valid record for the United States — of an immature bird seen on the King Ranch in Texas from 11 August to 8 September 1971 — has been reported (Haucke and Kiel, 1973, Auk, 90: 675). The 28 July to 9 August observations reported above are apparently the northernmost for *Jabiru mycteria* as well as the first for Oklahoma and the second for the United States.

6097 EAST 56th ST., TULSA, OKLAHOMA 74185, 31 JANUARY 1974.

## GENERAL NOTES

Successful nesting of hummingbird in Cimarron County, Oklahoma.—According to Nice (1931, Birds of Oklahoma, p. 110), Sutton (1967, Oklahoma birds, p. 287), and data filed at the University of Oklahoma Bird Range the only hummingbird whose breeding has heretofore been reported for Cimarron County, far western Oklahoma, is the Broad-tailed (*Selasphorus platycercus*). On 20 June 1912, a nest and two eggs of that species are said to have been "found on Marselus Bros. ranch" near Kenton (Tate, 1923, Proc. Oklahoma Acad. Sci., 3: 45; Nice, *op. cit.*); but *S. platycercus* has not been seen by anyone in summer in Cimarron County since that year despite the considerable attention bird students have given the Black Mesa country, and careful observers are beginning to suspect that Tate misidentified the specimen "taken" by him (Nice, *op. cit.*), the female bird at the nest, and the three birds that he saw at or near Kenton respectively on 28 September 1922 (Tate, *loc. cit.*), 23 September 1924, and 15 October 1924 (Nice, *op. cit.*). In any event, the only Cimarron County hummingbird specimen of any species now available for study is a Black-chin (*Archilochus alexandri*), a male collected at the east end of the Black Mesa near Kenton on 15 May 1966 (Sutton, *op. cit.*, p. 287). The capture of this specimen (one of two males seen on that date) leads one to believe that the breeding hummingbird of the area is the Black-chin.

On 3 July 1971—a hot, sunny day with ambient mid-afternoon temperature of 95° F.—Laurance Regnier, whose house is 4 miles south of Kenton, showed me and my ornithology class a hummingbird nest in his yard. The nest, which was made almost entirely of straw-colored plant down (without lichens), was near the end of a small bare elm branch about 6 feet 8 inches from the ground in a well shaded spot a few rods from the house and about