



Wildlife Window: The Wood Stork

Ungainly Up Close. Soars & Glides Effortlessly in Flight.

By Sue Remy, Ponds & Preserves Committee.

Often observed along Rivendell's ponds and preserves are large, white Wood Storks wading through shoreline plants and wetlands. Although this stork doesn't bring babies, it is a good flier, soaring with neck and legs outstretched. The wood stork is the only species of stork that breeds in the U.S. Bald-headed, this ungainly looking wading bird stands just over 3 feet tall, towering above almost all other wetland birds. Often confused with white Herons and Egrets, the wood stork's distinctive bald head and massive beak help differentiate it from other shoreline birds, with whom they often forage.

In flight, adult wood storks create a unique appearance in the air: all-white with distinctive black wings. Easily visible is their extended neck, long beak in front, and long legs far beyond the tail.

Let's learn more about these Wood Storks (*Mycteria americana*)



Appearance

The wood stork is a large, long-legged wading bird that reaches a length of 35-45 inches with a large wingspan of 60-65 inches. The primary and tail feathers are black.

The head and upper neck of adult wood storks have no feathers, (bald) but have gray rough scaly skin. Its distinctive beak is long, dark, and conical shaped. Wood storks have long black legs with pink toes.

Feeding & On the Shoreline

Adult and young wood storks are often seen sitting on their elbows, in a squat position. This position may give the appearance of the birds being injured, but this is just a different way to rest.

Wood storks feed on small to medium-sized fish, crayfish, amphibians, and reptiles. Their hunting technique is unique as they will move their partially opened bill through water, snapping up prey when the prey comes in contact with the bill. Wood storks are very social in nesting habitats, and often seen nesting in large colonies of 100-500 nests. For protection against land predators, wood storks often nest in trees with flooded bases or lake islands surrounded by water. (Photos: Bob Frank)



In Flight

Wood storks usually take to the air 3 to 4 hours after sunrise, when thermals begin to form (like raptors). They soar effortlessly to gain altitude and glide in unorganized flocks that do not maintain any particular formation (unlike other birds that fly in a "V" formation).

(Source: avaianreport.com)

Fun Fact

"Hey Mom, where do babies come from?" "Not from Storks!"



Newborn babies are often depicted with a long-legged, sharp-beaked bird known as a stork - usually with a cloth bundle dangling from its beak. A popular myth dates back to ancient Greece and the story of a vengeful goddess named Hera. According to this story, Hera grew jealous of a beautiful queen named Gerana and transformed her into a stork. The heartbroken Gerana then sought to retrieve her child from Hera's clutches, and the Greeks depicted the transformed bird with a baby dangling from its beak.

Your Actions Make a Difference! The wood stork is protected by the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is also protected as a Threatened species by the Federal Endangered Species Act. Wildlife food shortages due to loss of vegetation, use of pesticides and degradation of habitat from urban development continue to challenge all of our wildlife friends. Working together implementing our healthy ponds and preserves management strategies will help keep our favorite wildlife creatures visiting our community often. Water birds, like the Wood Stork, thrive in ponds with shoreline plantings where they can forage and rest. Your continued support helps us attract more of our wildlife friends!