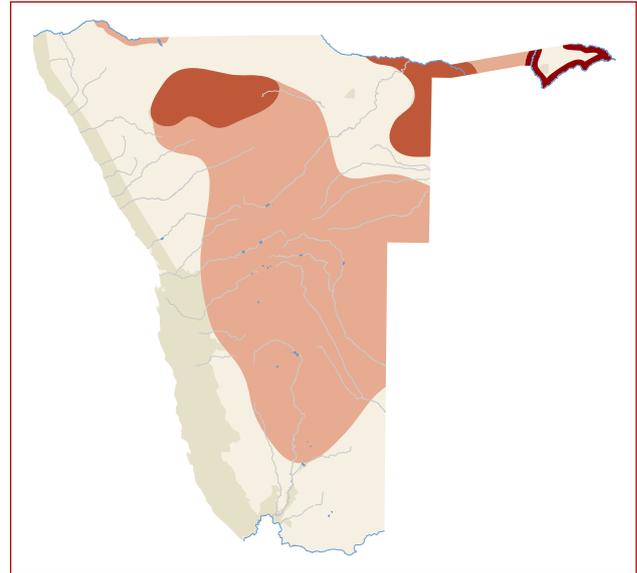


MARABOU STORK | *Leptoptilos crumeniferus*

RE Simmons | Reviewed by: A Monadjem; AJ Williams



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DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

This species is widespread throughout sub-Saharan Africa, with an estimated global population of 100,000 to 300,000 individuals (Delany & Scott 2002). Its distribution in southern Africa is centred around the Zambezi Valley (Mundy 2003), the Okavango Delta (Tarboton 2001) and throughout the Kruger National Park, South Africa. It is rare south of 28°S (Anderson & Herremans 1997). In southern Africa, it breeds at only one site in Botswana, one site in Swaziland and at fewer than a dozen sites in Zimbabwe (Tarboton 2001, Mundy 2003, Monadjem *et al.* 2012). In Namibia, it is common in the Zambezi region on the Chobe River at a density of 32 birds per 10 km (M Herremans, RE Simmons unpubl. data), and which at times may support up to 590 birds. It is also found on the Kwando and Linyanti swamps (estimated 140 birds), and less commonly on the Okavango River (estimated 50 birds: RE Simmons unpubl. data). It is thinly distributed throughout the central regions, where it is found on large dams from Hardap (mean of 23 birds, maximum of 149 birds), to the natural shallow Lake Oponono, north of Etosha National Park (mean of 14 birds, maximum of 53 birds: Jarvis *et al.* 2001, H Kolberg unpubl. data). A maximum of 900 birds, or up to 1% of the global population, probably occur in Namibia in an area covering 417,000 km².



ECOLOGY

The Marabou Stork frequents wetlands such as inland dams and pans, rivers, near open water and back swamps and, more recently, congregates and socialises around refuse dumps and abattoirs (Brown *et al.* 1982,

Conservation Status:	Near Threatened
Southern African Range:	Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Mozambique
Area of Occupancy:	417,000 km ²
Population Estimate:	Up to 900 birds
Population Trend:	Unknown
Habitat:	Wetlands, rivers, refuse dumps, abattoirs
Threats:	Decreasing food availability through a decrease in large predators and possibly increasing refuse dump sanitisation

Hines 1987, Brown 1990, Hancock *et al.* 1992, Anderson & Herremans 1997). It has rarely been recorded in woodlands or true desert and occurs rarely at coastal wetlands (Brown *et al.* 1982, Anderson & Herremans 1997). Breeding colonies in Namibia are relatively small and average 18 nests per colony (n=6) with the largest recorded to date comprising 24 active nests. Two to four eggs (mean = 2.7, n=29 clutches) are laid in August and September (n=8) (Brown *et al.* 2015). It has been recorded breeding in the Linyanti Swamps (Child 1972) and once during September in a mixed colony with the Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens* (Koen 1988). The largest regular breeding colony in southern Africa is in the Okavango Delta, where 50 to 200 pairs nest annually in mixed colonies generally in the dry winter months (Tarboton 2001). It does not necessarily require wetlands in which to breed, as evidenced by the most southerly colony known (up to 31 pairs) in Swaziland that nests in *Acacia* savannah (Monadjem *et al.* 2003, 2012). It nests in trees, particularly Baobab *Adansonia digitata*, in small colonies (up to 30 pairs), usually laying two to three eggs. Breeding success appears to be variable between years and localities (Mundy 2003, Monadjem *et al.* 2012). This species feeds by scavenging, especially at refuse dumps, where it feeds on offal and other human-generated waste, and by hunting prey such as fish, flamingos and nestling queleas, rodents and insects (Anderson 2005b).

THREATS

There are few direct threats to this species, but as a scavenger it relies to some extent on large predators that are decreasing in all but Namibia's national parks and certain conservancies. Refuse dumps that attract large numbers of Marabou Storks are also likely to become more sanitary in future years; for example, there are no longer birds congregating at the offal once dumped at the Katima Mulilo abattoir, as reported by Koen (1988).

CONSERVATION STATUS

The Marabou Stork is classified as *Near Threatened* in Namibia as it is a species of conservation concern, because of its small numbers in Namibia, its possible decline in future, and the rarity of breeding colonies in southern Africa. As a scavenging species, it is vulnerable to poisoning, both on farmlands where poisons are used for predator control and in north-eastern Namibia, where commercial poachers target vultures by poisoning carcasses, to reduce the likelihood of wildlife authorities being alerted to their activities by the presence of circling vultures. It is listed as *Near Threatened* in South Africa (Taylor *et*



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al. in press), and *Vulnerable* in Swaziland (Monadjem *et al.* 2003). However, the overall increasing large population does not warrant a global rating (IUCN 2012a). It is listed in Annex 2 of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) and should be accorded *Specially Protected* status in Namibia.

ACTIONS

Monitoring of populations along Namibia's northern rivers and reporting on any breeding activity and breeding success in Namibia is required. The actions listed to address the issue of poisoning, set out for the vultures and scavenging eagles, apply equally to the Marabou Stork.