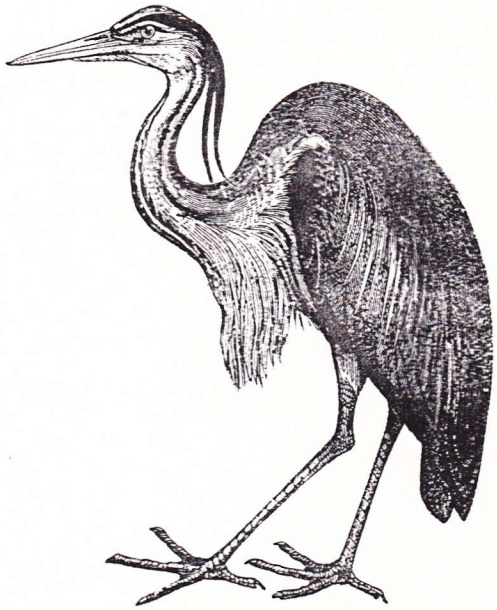
ICBP/SSC Heron Specialist Group

Heinz Hafner and James A. Kushlan



Old World Section

The Old World Section now has some 100 corresponding members. Over the past four years, correspondents have been involved in collecting information on the status of rare and/or endangered species. The information base in many countries, particularly Africa and Asia, is still very poor, and the Group intends to increase efforts to establish a network of observers and correspondents in the tropics.

Research priorities which have focused on the Mediterranean region include monitoring breeding populations of herons throughout the region in order to (a) identify threatened populations and sites, (b) identify conservation priorities for the heron populations breeding in the region, and (c) formulate guidelines for habitat management where populations are endangered.

A special effort has been made to improve our knowledge on the size and quality of feeding area required to sustain breeding populations of a given size. Thanks to an excellent international collaboration, data on available foraging habitats and the size and species composition of heron colonies has been collected for 31 colonies across Mediterranean France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Israel, Tunisia, and Algeria. The results can be used to predict the effect upon colony size and species composition of a reduction in area of particular types of habitat. Most importantly, the results show that the species diversity of herons breeding in the Mediterranean region is a function of habitat diversity. We therefore conclude that substantial diverse populations of herons in the Mediterranean region require not only sufficiently large shallow wetlands near their breeding sites, but also a diversity of habitats. The area and quality of freshwater habitats is undoubtedly the most important factor limiting the size and diversity of breeding heron populations in the Mediterranean region. Natural shallow freshwater bodies are a rapidly declining habitat resource in the region and merit special protection.

The loss and/or degradation of suitable nesting sites and foraging areas are major key issues affecting herons throughout the world. In many places, degradation of foraging areas is due to changes in agricultural practices, including increased use of pesticides.

New World Section

Research and conservation priorities in the New World include identifying Neotropical wetlands of importance to regional populations, identifying Neotropical wetlands of international importance, documenting the status of species (especially two thought to be at risk: zigzag heron (*Zibrilus undulatus*) and fasciated tiger heron (*Tigrisoma fasciatum*), determining the effects of disturbance to colony sites, examining pesticide contamination, determining foraging site requirements, and exploring whether herons can be used as indicators of wetland health.

Heinz Hafner
James A. Kushlan
Co-chairmen
Heron Specialist Group

Species 79
Vol. 15
1990