
ICBP/IWRB/SSC Heron Specialist Group

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The Heron Specialist Group is beginning a several-year program to synthesize knowledge on the distribution, changing status, and management needs of the herons of the world. Topics currently scheduled to be included in this review are: status in North America, South and Central America, Europe and the Mediterranean, Asia, Africa and Australia; colony site protection; feeding habitat management; migratory and wintering habitat; pesticides; aquaculture; captive populations; and herons as indicators of the environment. Contributions and thoughts regarding any of these issues are welcome.

Many of the 115 corresponding members of the Old World Section of the Heron Group are actively involved in field projects. The information collected has greatly improved our understanding of the requirements of these birds and there is now a good background for the choice of management practices. Because Ardeidae are top predators, management in their favor aims at the preservation of the biological richness of aquatic ecosystems in general.

Although some species are locally abundant (e.g., *Ardea cinerea*, *Bubulcus ibis*), this is not the case throughout all parts of their range. Habitat destruction and alteration have caused population declines in many areas, and we should be cautious in attributing the status of "common" to any heron species.

During their annual cycle, herons use a huge range of wetlands, sometimes separated by thousands of kilometers. It is vital to conserve all of these wetlands.

Another major concern is the increasing rate of degradation of nesting sites. Reedbeds of *Phragmites australis*, for example, are important breeding sites for the vulnerable species *Ardea purpurea* and *Botaurus stellaris*. In many traditional breeding areas of *Ardea purpurea*, reedbeds are overexploited by man and heron populations there have greatly declined. Woodlands, particu-

larly wet, deciduous woods which are the preferred breeding habitat for most of the Ardeidae, have become increasingly rare, and colonies frequently move because of habitat degradation (logging, clearance). This is particularly true for most of the Mediterranean countries where the Group envisages promoting a restoration program.

Heinz Hafner and Mauro Fasola have evaluated the habitats in the Mediterranean region that are of particular importance for herons. These are: woodlands, reedbeds, shallow freshwater habitats, manmade aquatic habitats (especially ricefields, industrial salinas, natural brackish and saltwater lagoons), and overall wetlands habitat diversity. Special efforts are underway to improve knowledge on the size and quality of feeding area required to sustain breeding populations, especially in France, Spain, Italy, and Greece.

Heron conservation efforts in Australia, led by Maz Maddock, have involved nest records and color banding schemes as part of Project Egret Watch. Stephen Gamett conducted a survey of heron colonies in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Colin Poole and the Asian Wetland Bureau have initiated a colour banding program for the endangered Chinese egrets (*Egretta eulophotes*). All sightings urgently need to be reported.

Jean-Luc Desgranges and Rejean Benoit have conducted an ecological survey of wading birds of the Dominican Republic. They found threats to include poaching, loss of habitat, and degradation of wetlands caused by pesticides. Juan Carlos Gambarotta reports some of the first information on colony sites in the east of Uruguay. Today 75% of the wetlands, known as "Banados del Este" have been lost, especially to drainage.

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