
IWRB/ICBP/SSC Heron Specialist Group

James A. Kushlan and Heinz Hafner

Status and Conservation of the Herons of the World

Hérons are large, popular, and in many cases spectacular birds found worldwide in aquatic habitats, especially in wetlands. In recent years aspects of their basic biology have become increasingly well understood, but understanding of their conservation needs has lagged substantially. Some populations are very small and localized, others have decreased, some have expanded, and nearly all are dependent on wetlands that are under increasing pressure worldwide. Such wetlands are widely acknowledged for their critical functions in the landscape.

Recent understanding of heron basic biology has suggested that herons reflect the ecological health of their wetland habitat and so might be able to serve as indicators for conservation action in wetlands. This is because wetlands generally support several species of heron that coexist, each using the mosaic of habitats and resources in different ways. The heron community (or guild) as a whole depends on healthy functioning of these wetlands because they require maintenance of hydrology, vegetation features, productivity, and the diversity of fish, amphibian, and invertebrate populations that serve as their prey. Many heron populations are migratory, and both depend on and serve as indicators for both summer and wintering wetland habitats, not atypically located on different continents. Conservation of these wetlands of international importance depends in large part on local and regional economic factors, and so herons as indicators of wetland functioning are an integral part of sustainable wetland conservation.

Given an understanding of basic biology, an appreciation for the needs for local conservation action, and the existence of a worldwide network of specialists associated with the IWRB/ICBP/SSC Heron Specialist Group, it has become appropriate to synthesize understanding of the conservation needs of this group, to create a concrete plan to guide their conservation and

management, and also to determine how herons can play a part in the emerging consensus on sustainable wetland conservation.

The potential for success of this endeavor is especially high now because of the multinational network of over 200 professional biologists and heron conservationists who have accumulated significant databases and understanding over the past two decades. These specialists, who have been studying heron biology in different parts of the world, have also gained some understanding of their conservation needs on a local scale. They have investigated individual species, specific habitats, single regions, or specific issues such as contaminants or captive breeding. This information has only recently become available, especially from remote areas in underdeveloped countries. It is critical to synthesize this new information, now available at the local scale, into a worldwide perspective.

Available information on heron biology and conservation was last compiled and synthesized in the monograph, *Hérons Handbook*, by James Hancock and James Kushlan (1984, Croom-Helm, London, and Harper & Row, New York). To update this work, over the next year contributors will compile presently available information and understanding of heron populations and conservation needs worldwide and synthesize this information into a conservation action plan.

The Heron Specialist Group seeks additional contributors to share their insight and information on heron status and conservation worldwide, and on their role relative to wise, sustainable use of wetlands. Please contact James Kushlan (University of Mississippi, Dept. of Biology, University, MS 38677, U.S.A.) if you would like to contribute to this effort.

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

ICBP/WPA/S

Peter Garson

The Pheasant Specialist groups that have now been formed by the Pheasant Association, for ICBP on behalf of a number of countries. The wealth of information and advice being sought on pheasant species, both in the wild and in captivity throughout Asia, Europe, and North America should be effectively coordinated in a focused group.

Fifth International Symposium

The fifth in a series of international symposia will take place in Lahore, Pakistan, on October 1, 1992. Participants from countries harboring wild pheasants included the People's Republic of China, Malaysia, Thailand, India, and the United States. They were joined by representatives from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Turkey.

The meeting centers on the status and distribution of pheasant habitat use and diet; management techniques; fieldwork techniques; monitoring wild pheasant populations in protected areas. Keynote speakers will discuss only a small part of the meeting was designed to be of informal worktime sessions and practical demonstrations.

The session on status and distribution of the national situation of at least two pheasant species (Sclater's monal (*Lopho*), and the bar-tailed pheasant (*S. sclateri*)). Critical in the wild. The symposium in India, and Thailand have resolutions calling for the form of more concrete action on behalf of these two species.