

SPECIAL TWENTIETH YEAR CELEBRATION SECTION

Wading Birds: Advances in Knowledge Since 1976

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In 1976, the North American Wading Bird Conference held in Charleston, South Carolina, brought together biologists and conservationists concerned with wading birds. Wading birds, in the North American sense, include the long-legged, mostly aquatic species that traditionally have been placed in the Ciconiiformes: the herons, egrets, bitterns, storks, hammerhead, whalebill, ibises, spoonbills, and flamingos. The 1976 conference focused on various aspects of the biology of these species, particularly their taxonomy, ecology, conservation, and population status, each featuring plenary speakers and contributed papers. The many good results of this conference could hardly have been anticipated. Intellectually, the volume of proceedings, *Wading Birds*, (Sprunt *et al.* 1978) set the research agenda for years to follow. Politically, it brought together not only wading bird biologists, but also those who studied other colonial waterbirds. Many holding those combined interests choose to begin meeting annually, thus founding the Colonial Waterbird Group, which later became the Colonial Waterbird Society. The Society immediately began publishing its

meeting proceedings that a few years later, evolved into the refereed journal, *Colonial Waterbirds*.

On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Wading Bird Conference, the Colonial Waterbird Society returned to Charleston for its annual meeting. The symposium this note introduces brought together several scientists from 2 continents to review the state of knowledge of wading bird biology as of 1996, with special attention to charting progress, or lack thereof, in the previous 20 years, and to offer some ideas for a research and conservation agenda for the Twenty-first Century. Reflecting the original themes, the following accounts address progress in systematics, ecology, conservation, and population biology. By presenting them in this Special Section of *Colonial Waterbirds*, we offer a permanent record and guide to research and conservation action for the next 20 years, or even longer.

REFERENCE CITED

- Sprunt, IV, A. S., J. C. Ogden and S. Winckler (Eds.). 1978. Wading birds. Research Report No. 7. National Audubon Society, New York.