

## EVIDENCE FOR THE BREEDING OF THE WOOD STORK IN ALABAMA, 1968

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In our heron studies we have made much use of aerial reconnaissance to locate nesting colonies, estimate population density and study migrations and dispersals.

For the past several years we have seen a few Little Blue Herons, *Florida caerulea*, and Cattle Egrets, *Bubulcus ibis*, in the area west of Tuskegee, Macon County. This year in a study of the ecologic impacts of wading birds on the aquatic environment, supported by the Alabama Water Resources Institute, we decided to search the area west of Tuskegee for colonies. On June 20, we spotted a large swamp several miles southwest of Hardaway, Macon County (Fig. 1).

Circling over the swamp was a large group of Black Vultures, *Coragyps atratus*; about 50 Cattle Egrets were feeding with some cattle at the eastern edge of the swamp; and at least a dozen white birds perched in a large cypress snag beside several Black Vultures. Rosemary suggested that these were none of the usual wading birds with which we are well acquainted because they did not flush when we approached but would partially spread their wings. After several passes we determined that they were Wood Storks, *Mycteria americana*. This seemed odd because the Wood Storks we have seen in the past were not present until late summer. Therefore we determined to look for them from the ground and investigate the possibilities that they had nested in the swamp.

On June 28, before we could return to the Hardaway swamp, we flew our usual population transect from Auburn to Demopolis. Just north of Benton, Montgomery County, we found a swamp containing at least 40 Wood Storks. No nests could be seen in the trees.

It was not until July 23, that we were able to reach the Hardaway swamp, on the ground and with a boat and suitable cameras. The swamp was about two feet lower than usual and thus was full of exposed logs and the passage through it was extremely difficult. It was necessary for me to wade and pull the boat and its contents over the logs to the location of the roosting snag. When we got to the snag, there was no doubt that nests were present. We counted four in adjacent trees and several Wood Storks stood by individual nests suggesting ownership (Fig. 2). We photographed both birds and nests in color and black and white.

None of the sourcebooks of Wood Stork distribution (Bent, 1926; Palmer, 1962; Imhof, 1962; or the A.O.U. Checklist, 1957) contain any indication that Wood Storks breed in Alabama but that they disperse through the area. Our data indicate that the birds were present in Alabama in these two places in the 1968 breeding season, that nests were present in the Hardaway swamp but no eggs or very young nestlings were seen or photographed. Whether older immatures were present remains to be determined from the color transparencies. Therefore, lacking a specimen for absolute proof of breeding, we have alternate evidence to indicate that they nested in Alabama in 1968.

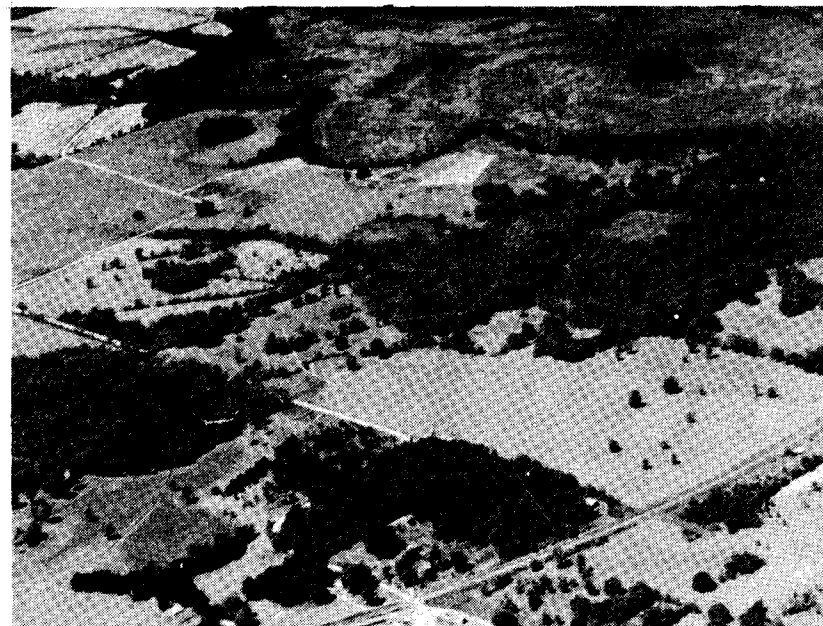


Figure 1. The colony area swamp, southwest of Hardaway, Macon County



Figure 2. One of the Wood Storks and its nest

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## Part II

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