

WADING BIRDS.



THE common crane is a noble and celebrated bird. The migrations of the crane have been noticed in the earliest writings; and as were the habits of the bird when Jeremiah (see ch. viii. 7) alluded to them, so are they now. Spread over a great portion of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and associated in large flocks, they journey northwards, in spring, to their accustomed breeding-places, and return southwards in autumn. Its aerial voyages are made at so great an elevation, that though the loud cries of the passing flock may be heard distinctly, the birds are themselves beyond the limits of our vision: these flights often take place during night.

The crane makes its nest among long herbage, reeds, and the luxuriant vegetation of swampy tracts, and sometimes on isolated ruins; the eggs are two, of a pale dull greenish colour, blotched with brown. In addition to worms, frogs, and snails, grain and vegetables constitute the favourite food of this bird; hence it is found to invade extensive plains under cultivation, and newly sown with corn.

We have spoken of the voice of the crane—and the same observation applies more or less to the whole family—as singularly loud and sonorous, so as to be heard while the bird is out of sight.

It is said by olden naturalists, that when a flock of cranes alight for a time on their migrations, sentinels are stationed on the higher branches with stones, which they drop on the least alarm, and thereby extend the warning the quicker among their comrades.

Hérons, associated as they are with rural scenes of the fast-changing English

landscape, possess a peculiar interest. Solitary, shy, and suspicious, he sits, during the day, roosting on his accustomed bough in the densest part of the wood, where the trees are tall; or if no such covert be near, he may be observed standing on one leg, immovable as a statue, in the middle of some wide morass, but so situated as to command a view of the prospect around. Ever watchful, his eye detects the intruder while yet at a distance; roused from his wakeful repose, he soars aloft, and wings his course away to some distant and more lonely haunt. The fishing time of this bird is generally before sunrise, and after sunset, and especially during moonlight.

During the breeding season the heron assembles in flocks, and, like the rook, resorts to a permanent settlement, which has served as a nursery for many generations. These breeding stations, or heronries, as they are termed, are always in the loftiest trees which the wood affords; and the nests, which are large flat masses constructed of sticks, are frequently placed, several close together, on the same tree. Few of these heronries are now in existence, compared with their number in former days, when the killing of one of these birds, except in the lawful way, subjected the offender to fine or imprisonment. Consequently the bird is now by no means so common as it was when strictly preserved for the favourite sport of hawking, in which the nobility alone were permitted to join. Its soaring flight, its resolute defence when pressed to the last (often spearing the falcon in his swoop) rendered it the most valued of game. Nor was its flesh, though now accounted uneatable, considered at all inferior to that of the finest wild-fowl.

A singular fact is related in Selby's Ornithology, respecting a tame heron, by which it appears that this bird is not incapable of swimming. A gentleman had a pair of these beautiful birds, and the following is a part of his narration:—"A large old willow tree had fallen down into the pond, and at the extremity, which is partly sunk in the sludge and continues to vegetate, water-hens breed. The old cock heron swims out to the nest, and takes the young if he can. He has to swim ten or twelve feet where the water is between two and three feet deep. His motion through the water is slow, but his carriage is stately. I have seen him fell a rat by one blow on the back of the head, when the rat was munching at his dish of fish."

A peculiar danger is said to attend the slaying of these birds. They have at all times a strong propensity to attack the eyes of all against whom they have hostile feelings, but when they have been supposed to have been wounded to insensibility, they have suddenly started up, and pecked an eye out of their adversary with unerring aim.

Captain Owen relates that on the West Coast of Africa, "I winged a beautiful aigret heron that was passing over head, and brought it to the ground; when, as I was in the act of picking it up, it struck at my eye with its beak; and but for my glasses, must have inevitably have reduced it to perpetual darkness. I have since heard of a gentleman who, under similar circumstances, was not so fortunate; he still lives, and I shall feel pleasure if by stating this incident, it should be the means of saving others from so distressing a circumstance."

Of the power of its beak Captain Brown gives an example. "A gentleman belonging to the parish of Bothwell, being on a shooting excursion, accompanied by a small spaniel, observed a heron wading a little above a waterfall. He fired, wounded it, and sent his

dog into the stream to bring it to land. As soon as the dog had come within its reach, the heron drew back its head, and with all its force, 'sudden as thought,' struck him in the ribs with its bill. The gentleman again fired, and killed the heron; but it had well revenged itself: the dog and the bird floated dead together down the foaming waterfall."

The gentle and social disposition of the stork, conjoined with its utility, has caused it to be regarded in all ages and countries with peculiar complacency. In ancient Egypt it held the next place to the sacred ibis, and in many parts of Africa and the East is still regarded with reverence.

In the month of March, or beginning of April, the stork arrives in small bands or flocks in Holland, where it universally meets with a kind and hospitable reception; returning year after year to the same town, and the same chimney-top, it re-occupies its deserted nest; and the gladness these birds manifest in again taking possession of their dwelling, and the attachment they testify towards their benevolent hosts, are familiar in the mouths of every one. Nor is the stork less remarkable for its affection towards its young; and the story is well known of a female bird, which, during the conflagration at Delft, chose rather to perish with her young than abandon them to their fate. Incubation, and the rearing of the young being over by August, the stork, in the early part of that month, prepares for its departure. The north of Africa, and especially Egypt, are the places of its winter sojourning. Previous to setting out on their airy journey, multitudes assemble from the surrounding districts, chattering with their bills, as if in consultation. On the appointed night, a period which appears to be universally chosen by the migratory tribes, they mount into the higher regions of the air, and sail away southwards to their destined haven.

The nest of the stork is formed of



THE COMMON CRANE.

twigs and sticks, and the eggs from three to five in number, and nearly as large as those of a goose, are of a yellowish white. Of the countless multitudes in which the stork assembles, in order to perform its periodical migrations, some idea may be entertained from Dr. Shaw's account of the flocks, which he witnessed leaving Egypt, and passing over Mount Carmel, each of which was half a mile in breadth, and occupied a space of three hours in passing over. When reposing, the stork stands upon one leg, with the neck bent backward, and the head resting between the shoulders. Such is also its attitude when watching for its prey. Its plumage is pure white, with the exception of the great wing-coverts and quill-feathers, which are black. Bill and legs red; length, three feet three inches.

There is a curious belief in Germany that the stork pays a sort of rent; the first year a quill feather (some say cut into a pen), the second, an egg, the third, a young stork, and continue this routine as long as they stay, always leaving it under some part of the house-roof.

They are fond of returning to one place, however far they may fly, and the following fact is of interest:—In 1833 a Polish gentleman having caught a stork upon his estates near Lemburg, put round its neck a light iron collar, with this inscription, "*Hæ ciconia ex Polonia*" ("This stork comes from Poland"), and set it at liberty. The next year, 1834, the bird returned to the same spot, and was caught again by the same person; it had acquired a new collar of gold, with the inscription, "*India cum donis remittit ciconiam Polonis*" ("India sends back the stork to the Poles with gifts"). The gentleman having shown the inscription to his neighbours, set the bird at liberty.

Many stories are told of the intelligence of storks. Among others, Captain Brown relates the following:—A tame stork had taken up his abode for some years in the college-yard at Zabingen.

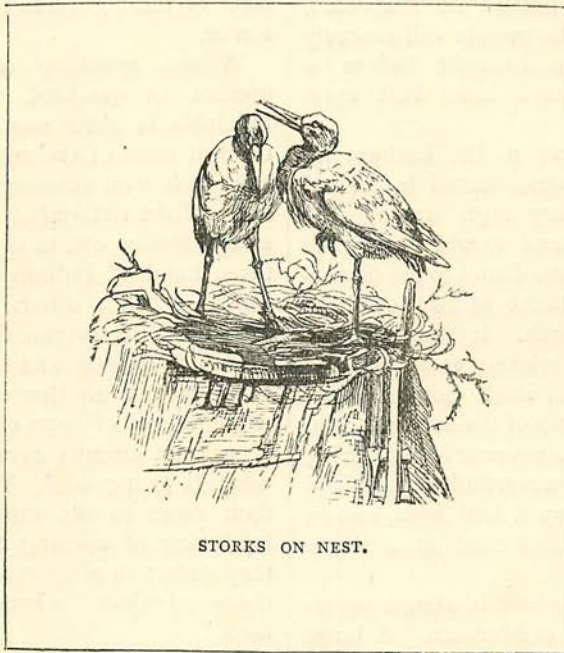
Upon a neighbouring house was a nest, in which the storks that annually resorted to the place used to hatch their eggs. One day, in autumn, a young collegian fired a shot at this nest. Probably the stork that was sitting on the nest was wounded by the shot, for after that time he did not fly out of it for several weeks. However, at the usual time, he took his departure with the rest of the storks. In the ensuing spring, a stork appeared on the roof of the college, who, by clapping his wings, seemed to invite the tame stork to come to him.

The latter, however, could not accept the invitation, as his wings were clipped. After some days the wild stork came down into the yard, the tame one went to meet him, clapping his wings, as if to bid him welcome, but was immediately attacked by the other with great fury. Some persons protected him, but the wild stork often repeated his attempts, and incommoded him throughout the whole summer. The next spring, instead of a single stork, four of them came at once into the yard, and attacked the tame one. As he was unable, of himself, to contend with such a number of adversaries, the cocks, hens, geese, ducks, in short, all the poultry in the yard, came to his assistance, and rescued him from his enemies. The people of the house now paid greater attention than before to this stork, and prevented his being further molested during that year. But, in the beginning of the third spring, upwards of twenty storks rushed at once into the yard with the utmost fury, and killed the tame stork before either man or beast could afford him assistance.

A French surgeon at Smyrna, wishing to procure a stork, and finding great difficulty, on account of the extreme veneration in which they are held by the Turks, stole all the eggs out of a nest, and replaced them with those of a hen; in process of time the young chickens came forth, much to the astonishment of

Mr. and Mrs. Stork. In a short time Mr. Stork went off and was not seen for two or three days; when he returned, with an immense crowd of his companions, who all assembled in the place, and formed a circle, taking no notice of the numerous spectators, which so unusual an occurrence had collected. Mrs. Stork was brought forward into the midst of the circle, and, after some consultation, the whole flock fell upon her, and tore her to pieces; after which they

replaced with a goose's egg. The stork did not appear conscious of this, and the egg was hatched; when the male bird, perceiving the difference, flew round the nest several times with loud screams, and disappeared for three days, during which time the female took care of the strange offspring. Early on the fourth morning, the inmates were disturbed by loud and discordant cries, in a field fronting the house, where they saw five hundred storks assembled; one, standing



STORKS ON NEST.

immediately dispersed, and the nest was entirely abandoned.

A similar case occurred on the estate of a gentleman of landed property near Berlin, which I quote here in corroboration of those extraordinary occurrences, which show so much reflection, so much feeling, and also the powers of communication which these birds possess. A pair of storks built a nest on one of the chimneys belonging to the above gentleman, and he climbed up to it, and found an egg, which he took away, and

about twenty yards before the nest, apparently haranguing his companions, who stood listening with evident emotion. When this bird had finished his discourse he retired, another rose, and seemed to address the assembly; he was followed by several others, till about eleven o'clock, when they all rose at one time, uttering dismal cries. The female remained on her nest, watching their motions with apparent trepidation. In a short time the body of storks made towards her, headed by one bird, sup-

posed to be the mate, who struck her vehemently three or four times and knocked her out of the nest. The whole mass then followed up the attack, until they had not only destroyed the female stork (who made no attempt either to escape or defend herself), but the young gosling, and utterly removed every vestige of the nest itself. Since that time no stork has been seen in that neighbourhood.

It is generally supposed in Germany that a stork never builds on a bad man's house, and if a person be suspected, even of murder, the people will scarcely suffer him to be brought before a magistrate if a stork have built upon his house.

Smeathman gave to Dr. Latham an anecdote of a domesticated individual which roosted very high among the silk-cotton trees, and would descry the servants bringing the dishes to the dinner-table from a distance of two or three miles from its perch. It stood behind its master's chair waiting to be fed, and occasionally helped itself, notwithstanding the guardianship of the servants, who carried switches to prevent its snatching the meat, which it nevertheless contrived to do. In this way it had been known to swallow a boiled fowl at a single mouthful.

These birds are held in almost superstitious reverence in Morocco. A large hospital has been built at Fez, for nursing sick cranes and storks, and burying them when they are dead. This care of them arises from the belief that they are human beings from some distant land, who assumed that shape in order to visit Barbary, and who return to their own country and resume the human form.

The night-heron is very widely spread over Asia, Africa, and Southern Europe. In our islands the night-heron is a bird of rare and accidental occurrence; in Spain it is common, and in the adjacent countries. In many respects it resem-

bles the common heron in its manners, breeding like that bird, in society, on the topmost branches of trees, and roosting during the day in the recesses of woods adjacent to wild swamps and rivers, which it visits on the approach of twilight in quest of prey. During the flight of these birds to their fishing-stations, and throughout the night, they continually utter a hoarse hollow croak, ominous of death in the ears of superstition, as we believe is also the boom of the bittern, at which dread roar the credulous wayfarer of the night has stood aghast with terror.

Wilson, speaking of the American species, or qua-bird, which visits Philadelphia in great numbers, breeding in the tall trees of the vast cedar-swamps, says that "on entering the swamp the noise of the old and of the young would almost induce one to suppose that two or three hundred Indians were choking or throttling each other. The instant an intruder is discovered, the whole rise into the air in silence, and remove to the top of the trees in another part of the woods, while parties of from eight to ten make occasional circuits over the spot to see what is going on." While flying from their roost to the marshes, about the beginning of evening twilight, he says they utter, "in a hoarse and hollow tone, the word '*Qua*,'" whence the name qua-bird.

In the night-heron the legs are not so long in proportion, nor is the space above the tarsal joint naked for so great an extent as in the common heron. The middle and outer toe are connected at the base by a membrane, and the middle claw is pectinated.

The adult plumage is as follows:—Top of the head, back, and scapulars, black, with bluish and greenish reflexions; three white very narrow feathers, six or seven inches in length, taking their origin at the back of the head, just above the nape, and descending backwards; lower part of the back, wings,



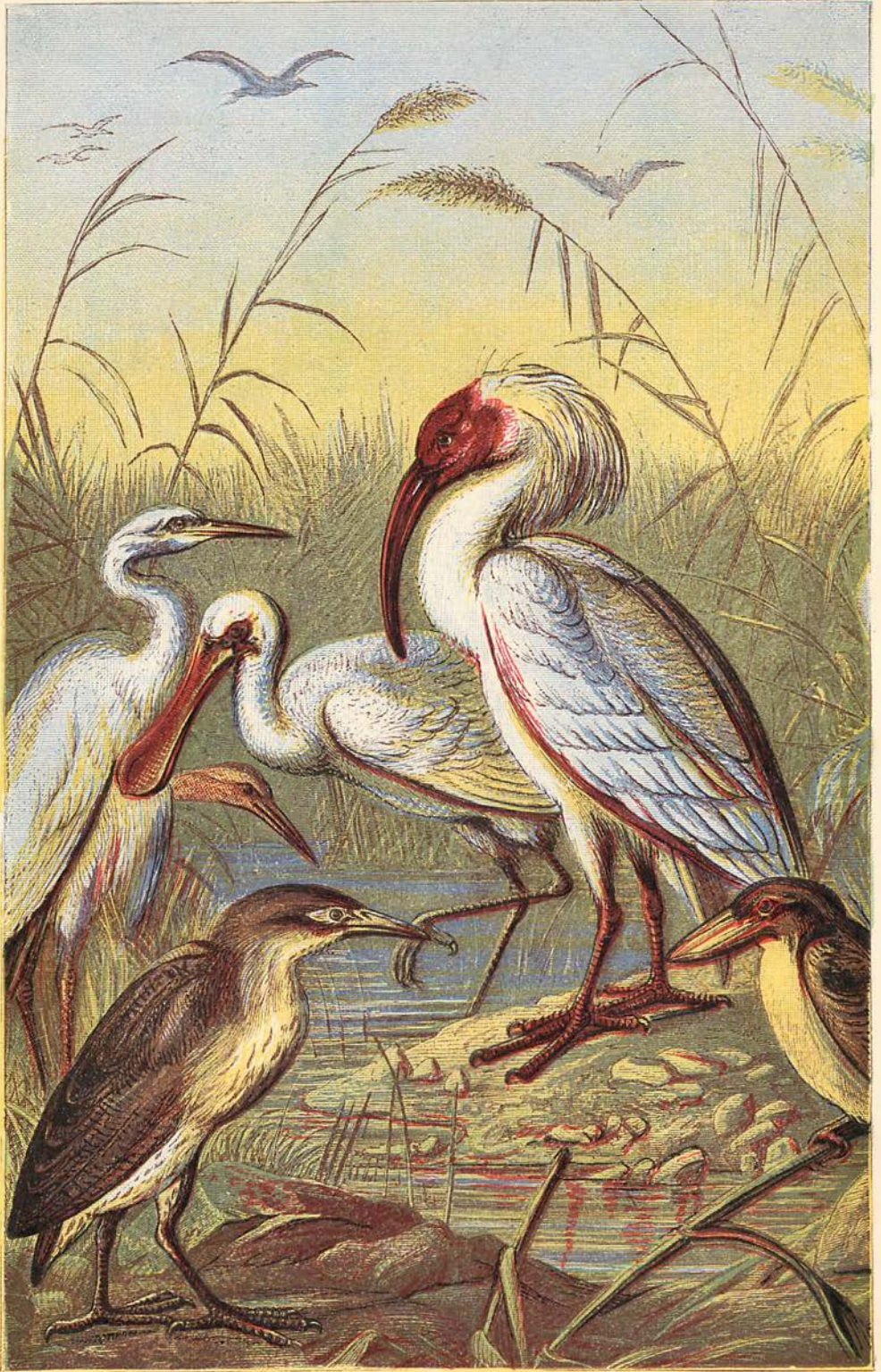
WEST AFRICAN TANTALUS.

and tail, clear ash-colour; forehead, space above the eyes, throat, front of the neck, and lower parts, white; bill black, yellowish at the base of the lower mandible; iris red; feet yellowish-green. Length, rather more than one foot eight inches.

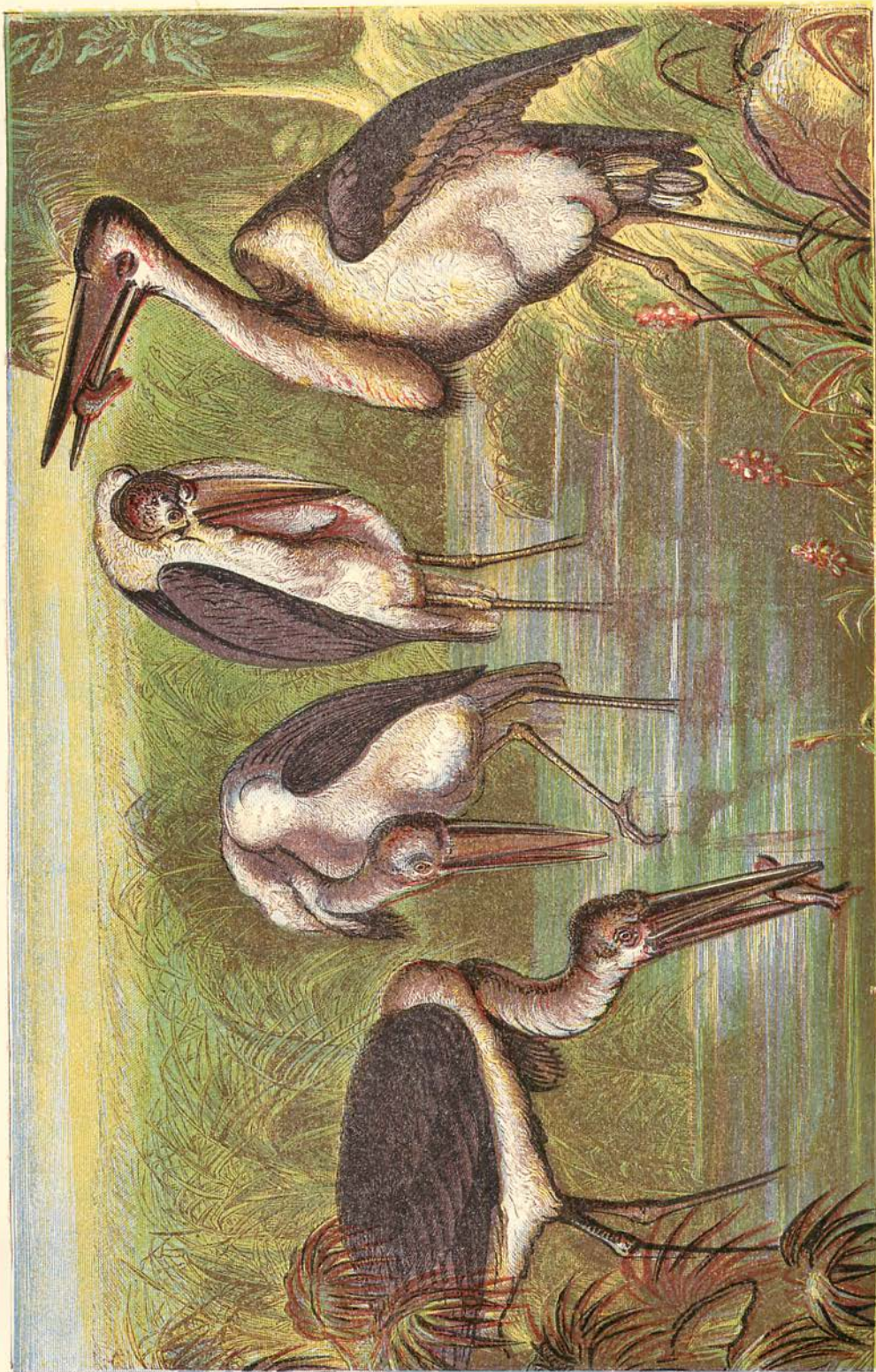
In the young of the year the three long feathers from the back of the head are wanting, and the general plumage is of a brown tinge, dashed and variegated with rufous: the lower parts being clouded with brown, white, and ash-colour.



HERONS.



CRANES, HERONS, AND SPOONBILL.



MARABOUS.