

Ornithological Observations



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Ornithological Observations accepts papers containing faunistic information about birds. This includes descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and plumage. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, and any other interesting or relevant material.

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WHITE STORK BECAME RESIDENT IN THE JOHANNESBURG CBD IN 2013

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"Apart from a few breeding pairs in the southern Cape Province, the White Stork is a nonbreeding Palearctic migrant to southern Africa." (Allen, 1997)

Robinson Deep was an important gold mine in the early years of Johannesburg. Its mine dump (situated at S26°14', E28°02') lies immediately to the west of the Turffontein Race Course, just to the south of the CBD, and is part of the wide swath of sandy dumps that characterize that part of the city. The habitat is typical devastated industrial, and for years the dump was no different from any other. I have passed the dump weekly since the early 1990s, en route to Suikerbosrand.

Towards the end of 2008, the city started using it as a landfill site, as part of a long-term gas-to-energy programme. Methane to generate power will be harvested from the waste. Carbon credits will be earned as well. Sewage farms and municipal dumps are renowned for the birdlife they sustain, and not surprisingly, this dump soon attracted its scavengers.

By the spring of 2009, the first White stork *Ciconia ciconia* discovered it. Since then they have become regulars there, and the duration of their winter absence has become steadily shorter.

Table 1 – The last and first sightings of White Stork at the Robinson Deep Dump – the dates in each case are the last and first date of observation. Birds would have left less than a week after and arrived less than a week before the date.

Year	Date left	Date returned	Number of weeks absent
2010	5 April	14 September	23
2011	7 April	8 August	18
2012	21 May	4 July	9
2013	present throughout the winter, though in smaller numbers than the >100 during summer		

I do not know whether any breeding has occurred. It would be unlikely on the dump itself, because the stork have to compete with sacred ibis and human recyclers. However, on 11 July 2011 (in the middle of the period of absence of the main flock) I saw a single small sub-adult stork in a flock of black-headed and grey heron. The birds were foraging in the newly-burnt fields flanking the Klip River, about 10 km south of the dump.

The greatest number of stork over the dump at one time was more than 300. There are also hundreds of sacred ibis, some grey-headed gull (otherwise uncommon in Johannesburg, but more typical of the East Rand pans), pied crow, feral pigeon, and kite during the summer. I suspect that the stork have escaped notice because mine dumps are not particularly salubrious spots at the best of times, and twitchers would have had no special reason to look there.

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References

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