

Birds in the Backyard

Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*)



The Painted Stork is a large, strikingly-coloured waterbird with an orange face, orangish-yellow long bill, pink legs, a black-glossy green breast band, and black and pink wing feathers set against white plumage. The species is resident across most of India and in parts of southeast Asia, and shows only local migrations. It uses freshwater wetlands and flooded rice fields, wading slowly, sometimes stirring the water with its legs to flush out prey, and feeding on fish that are sensed by touch. Such tactile foraging demands a lot of time spent with the head down facing the water. Whether flocking with their own species or with other species that show visual foraging allows painted storks to detect predators quickly is something that can be studied.

The breeding season is variable across the species' range, beginning in mid-August in northern India and in October-November or even later in southern India. Thus, fledglings or nests can be seen at this time of the year. Nests are built on trees and breeding colonies are sometimes formed along with other waterbird species. Well-known painted stork nesting sites near human habitation include Kokkare Bellur village in Karnataka and the Delhi zoo. Some interesting research on painted stork foraging and nesting ecology has been carried out (see <https://www.springer.com/in/book/9781441984678>) and more awaits to be done. Unfortunately, painted storks, along with many other waterbirds, suffer from waterbodies being drained and destroyed for construction, and being polluted with effluents and garbage. The species is currently listed by the IUCN as Near Threatened.

By: T N C Vidya

Photo Credits: Meghna Boby Basumallick, Kolkata