

## The SOLEMN FISHERMEN of the MARSHES

*Birds that Walk on Stilts—Voiceless Courtship of the Stork—His Grotesque Ideas about Dancing—The Adjutant's Military Strut—Long Flight of the Cranes*

**STORKS, HERONS, AND CRANES.** "Stilt-walkers" is a term that describes these wading and marsh-dwelling birds, for, balanced on their long slender legs, they are able to go about through the muddy slime of the swamp and yet keep their beautiful plumage in immaculate condition. They are found in most parts of the world, generally along shores or muddy flats. They feed on fish, small water creatures, and water plants, and most species eat also mice and some seeds and grains.

The common white stork, the hero of fable, song, and folk-story, found during the summer in most of the countries of Europe, breeds from southern Sweden to Spain and Greece, and winters in Africa and India. Its favourite nesting-place is on the roofs of tall buildings, and on many house-tops in Denmark, Sweden, and Holland platforms, and often cart-wheels, are placed to induce the stork to build there. The birds return to the same nest year after year, each season adding to the rough sticks composing their nest, until the pile sometimes reaches a height of several feet.

In Europe storks are carefully protected, which accounts for their friendly confidence in human beings. The tall bird, with his white plumage set off by black, and red beak and legs, is a beautiful sight as he moves about the meadows. The stork has no voice, and during the mating season, when other birds express themselves in song, he goes through the most grotesque antics, leaping, bounding, and wildly flapping about with clattering beak.

The Adjutant is a gigantic stork found in southern Asia and in Africa. Some species stand about 6 feet high and have a wing span of nearly 14 feet. It gets its name from its military attitude and walk. The plumage is very untidy-looking. From the under side of the

wing are taken the soft fur-like marabou feathers so popular as a trimming. In villages and towns of India it may be seen stalking about the streets, where it acts as a scavenger.

Closely related to the storks are the ibises. The sacred ibis was revered by the ancient Egyptians. It was the subject of many superstitions, and at death was mummified, many bodies having been found in the tombs of ancient Egypt. Though now unknown in Egypt, it still breeds on the upper Nile and in other parts of Africa.

The spoonbill is a relative of the ibis. It has a long, broadly expanded bill, with which it gathers insects and other water-dwellers from the mud in shallow water. The European spoonbill is white.

The heron family is as widely distributed as is that of the stork. The many species are characterized by their slender body and neck, straight narrow beak, large blunt wings, and patches of down feathers. Several species, such as the egrets, have elongated feathers on the top of the head and other parts of the body. Except during their breeding season most herons are generally seen alone.

The common European heron was formerly preserved in Britain for the sport of hawk-ing. The upper feathers are grey and the under feathers greyish-white. The head is crested with long blackish plumes.

This bird is a great fisher. He stands statue-like in the water, until his keen eyes discover a fish coming towards him. Then, at exactly the right instant, with one sudden stroke of the bill, the fish is seized. Sometimes he stalks slowly through the shallow water, lifting each foot above the surface and sliding it into the water again so cautiously that scarcely a ripple appears.

The egrets comprise some of the most

A BIRD FAVOURITE



The White Stork, like all the "Stilt-walkers," is very careful when wading about to keep his plumage neat and clean.

A QUEER BIRD WITH A QUEER NAME



No wonder the Arabs of the White Nile, where he makes his home, call this stork "Abu Markub," for it means "Father-of-a-Shoe." Other names are "Shoe-bill" and "Whale-headed Stork."