

State's Two Northernmost Records for Wood Stork

First-Year Wood Stork in Du Page County

by Nancy Bent and Sandy Woltman

On 24 August 2001, Lombard homeowner Joanne Mueller visited the Willowbrook Wildlife Center, a federally licensed wildlife rehabilitation center in Glen Ellyn, DuPage County, to report a strange bird in her yard, which is roughly 0.8 miles east of the East Branch of the DuPage River. She described the bird as tall and white, with black under its wings and with a large bill that curved downward at the tip. Sandy Woltman, a wildlife specialist at the center, drove to the Mueller house with her husband, Dale, to look at a bird that sounded interesting enough to investigate.

They were expecting a Great Egret. Surprisingly, it was a Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*), a bird that has been on the federal endangered species list since 1984. Illinois is well out of its normal range.

The stork had the pale yellow bill and facial skin, along with the buffy, down-covered head and neck of a first-year bird. The Wood Stork was sitting on its hocks when first observed, but then stood up to the 40-inch height of a full-grown bird. When the Woltmans approached the bird to determine if it needed help, the bird took two running steps and launched itself into a tree, revealing its black primaries and secondaries.

Upon talking with the Muellers, Sandy discovered the bird had been using their yard and the yard of next-door neighbor Christine Kaluzinski since 5 August 2001. Christine Kaluzinski had been feeding fish to the bird, and it had been obtaining water from the Muellers' decorative pond and from a water dish Christine had set out.

As this Wood Stork was far out of range, and because it is a federally endangered species, Sandy decided it would be better off captured and returned to the Southeast than it would be left at a large backyard in DuPage County. Also, if the bird allowed itself to be captured, it was a good indication that it was weak and/or ill enough to need help. The next day a capture team consisting of six staff and volunteers from Willowbrook—Sandy Woltman, Rose Prince, Sandy Fejt, Dale Woltman, Ron Skleney, and Nancy Bent—was assembled. Once on site the plan was to approach the stork while Anthony Mueller, son of the homeowners who alerted Willowbrook, distracted it by throwing small fish to the bird. When the stork finally made a

break for it, the capture team was close enough that Nancy Bent was easily able to hand catch it.

The stork was transported to Willowbrook Wildlife Center, where it was treated for dehydration and feather lice. The bird was also suffering from muscle atrophy in the breast. Weighing only 5.1 pounds (adult weight is 5.9-6.9 pounds, Coulter et al 1999), the bird consistently ate the 25 to 30 ounces of fish fed to it.

The tarsal length revealed the bird to be a male. He was moved to a large flight cage for exercise after his condition stabilized, where he was observed flying and catching live fish provided in a large cement pool.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries were cooperating to find a place to release the stork, and he was to be marked with a satellite tag to follow his movements.

Unfortunately, the tragic events of 11 September



First-year Wood Stork at the Willowbrook Wildlife Center, Glen Ellyn, DuPage County, September 2001. Photo by Dale Woltman.