

Ornithology and Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) identification in Nazinga Game Ranch - Burkina Faso



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Abstract - With 317 bird species recorded today, bird richness of the Nazinga Game Reserve doesn't need to be demonstrated anymore. To take advantage of the visit of the Belgian team from the "Cigognes sans frontières" program, in November 1999, we found it interesting to introduce the Black Stork to the NGR staff. This bird lives six months in temperate areas, as Belgium for example, and six months in tropical areas like Burkina Faso. This was a good way to set a link between our two countries, specially to compare their respective environments. We talked about storks biology, requirements, occupied habitats during the stay in Europe, migrations and Argos satellite monitoring. We explained the migration phenomenon and the journey to West-Africa for many European species but also the importance of an international protection of those birds. Even if it's not easy for a tracker to understand species conservation at a continental or international scale, the Black Stork example was a good occasion to popularize this subject in general.

As part of the "Scientific Valorisation Project of the Nazinga Game Ranch (NGR)", the Belgian Association for the Promotion of Education and Teaching Abroad (APEFE) is providing, since April 1999, a coordinator responsible for training sessions. Besides the main conservation and development goals of the project, there is a specific training goal for all the people involved in the ranch every day's administration to offer a better service to visitors.

The targeted public consists mainly of foresters, trackers and tourist guides being trained on various topics as :

- General notions of ecology;
- Behaviour and recognition of the big mammals and the most significant birds species;
- Inventory techniques of the mammals and bird-life;
- Recognition of specific bird families (i.e. storks, waders, game birds, ...);
- Conceptions of cartography, GPS use;
- Hunting rules;
- And so on...

Before teaching animal life courses, we have examined briefly the classification of live being to provide the trackers with more structured knowledge and give them the basics of animal systematic.

We included notions on plant and animal kingdoms, vertebrate-invertebrate distinction, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish categories and their main characteristics. Most of Nazinga's ranch trackers didn't really need a training to recognise the large mammals species : they already have a huge experience on that. But to review how to identify age and sex categories helped to unify this knowledge where personal belief (sometimes far from the reality) used to prevail.

Despite their profound knowledge about animal behaviours, the trackers had only a few notions on animal classification and compared anatomy. We exposed the main systemic principles and described the peculiar characteristics of each systematic group.

We described the habits (reproduction, diet, habitat...) and identification criteria of all the ungulates found in the ranch. For those species that can be hunted, we insisted also on the sexes and ages determination to better respect the new shooting rules.

With 329 bird species encountered in the NGR, we don't need to argue anymore on birdlife richness in the area. But unfortunately it has been neglected so far by the wildlife observation tourism. One could indeed keep tourists busy watching birds during the more quiet moments when mammals are hiding themselves. It also makes the public aware of a varied and incredibly colourful part of the wild animal life.

We developed for Nazinga's trackers and guides a training aimed to give them the necessary knowledge to know and describe a few typical and easy to see species.

We gave one hundred hours of theoretical training in ornithology and a few morning observations sessions in the field. The trackers and guides were working with the help of notes giving all the basic knowledge necessary to describe a bird. About 60 of the commonest species found in Nazinga were described and we added 4 posters showing about 160 species of Nazinga birdlife and 2 special training sessions about particular families (waders, game birds ...).

The trackers and guides essentially learned to correctly describe a bird (height, shape, colours, behaviour), to deduce the principal criteria needed for identification and to finally be able to explain in French why this bird belongs to this species. We worked on 60 species, the most current ones and those able to draw tourists' attention. We insisted on the vernacular names in French and Gourounsi, the description and habits of all these species.

The Belgium team of the project " Cigognes sans Frontières " visited Nazinga in November 1999 to organise the NetD@ys99 and terminate the

shooting of their film about Black Stork's migration. This visit gave us the opportunity to present to the staff of the ranch this bird living 6 months in temperate climate such as the Walloon Region and 6 months in tropical climate as in Burkina Faso. Black Stork could help the cooperation between our two regions in relation to the environment.

We mentioned the stork's biology, its favorite habitats, its migrations to Africa and how we followed it with the ARGOS satellite transmitters. In collaboration with the local NGO NATURA-MA, we could explain the migrations and the journey into Africa of a lot of European species, the necessary international protection actions of all the migrant species and we were able to talk about themes such as "Hunting and nature preservation", "Species protection", and so on.

After the training in ornithology, the "Black stork" subject was used to review how to describe birds. It was also an opportunity to mention some of the problems in Europe to preserve the environment and their influence at an international level. Even if it's difficult for trackers knowing only the landscape of the Nazinga ranch to think about species preservation on a continental or planetary level, we could mention this in its outline, thanks to the black stork theme.

Besides the didactic and tourism activity goals, the ornithological knowledge learned by the guides and trackers enabled us to observe the black stork's wintering population at the water spots of the ranch. Three NGR agents followed in January 2001 a training session in the Sine-Saloum Delta (SENEGAL) on inventory techniques and aquatic birds recognition. All these programs should result in improved basic knowledge allowing to follow the aquatic birds wintering population in Nazinga every year and also in all of Burkina Faso, which is, since, participating in the annual African Waterbird Census (AfWC) organised by Wetlands International.

La Réserve de chasse de Nazinga (Burkina Faso) et le projet de l'APEFE

Depuis avril 1999, l'Association belge pour la Promotion de l'Education et de la Formation à l'Etranger (APEFE) met à la disposition de la Réserve de Nazinga un coordinateur, responsable notamment de la formation du personnel du ranch (forestiers, pisteurs, guides touristiques..). Les matières abordées sont principalement :

- Notions d'écologie,
- Identification et éthologie des grands mammifères et des oiseaux,
- Techniques d'inventaire des mammifères et oiseaux,
- Réglementation de la chasse,
- Cartographie, utilisation du GPS.

La plupart des pisteurs ont une grande expérience de terrain en ce qui concerne les grands mammifères mais les croyances populaires étaient parfois loin de la réalité en ce qui concerne les critères d'identification de l'âge et du sexe des animaux. Avec 329 espèces, la richesse ornithologique de la réserve de chasse de Nazinga est

incontestable. Parmi celles-ci, 60 espèces fréquemment rencontrées ont fait l'objet de cours théoriques et d'observations sur le terrain auprès des guides et pisteurs. Cela dans le but de développer le tourisme ornithologique.

En novembre 1999, l'équipe du programme belge " Cigognes sans frontières " est passée par Nazinga dans le cadre du tournage du film sur la migration de la Cigogne noire. Cela a été l'occasion de présenter au personnel local cette espèce qui vit six mois par an dans les régions tempérées, puis les six mois suivants dans les régions tropicales. En collaboration avec une ONG locale, " NATURAMA ", ce fut aussi l'occasion d'expliquer le phénomène de la migration, la nécessité d'une protection internationale des migrateurs, la préservation des biotopes etc..

Depuis lors, les connaissances ornithologiques des guides et pisteurs ont permis de suivre la population hivernante de la Cigogne noire aux points d'eau du ranch.

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