

PROPOSAL FOR INCLUSION OF SPECIES ON THE APPENDICES OF THE CONVENTION
ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS

A. PROPOSAL: Inclusion of Threskiornis aethiopicus aethiopicus in Appendix II.

B. PROPONENT: Government of the Federal Republic of Germany

C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

1. Taxon

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1.1. Classis | Aves |
| 1.2. Ordo | Ciconiiformes |
| 1.3. Familia | Threskiornithidae |
| 1.4. Genus/Species/Subspecies | <u>Threskiornis aethiopicus</u> (Latham)
1790. ssp. <u>aethiopicus</u> |
| 1.5. Common names | |
| English: | Sacred Ibis |
| Spanish: | Ibis Sagrado |
| French: | Ibis sacre |

2. Biological data

2.1. Distribution

Three subspecies have been described. T. a. bernieri and T. a. abbotti are confined to Madagascar and Aldabra respectively. (The total population of abbotti was only 150-200 birds in 1968). The nominate race is widespread in Africa south of the Sahara, from Senegal east to Ethiopia and western Somalia and south to southern South Africa. It formerly occurred in Egypt, but is now extinct there. An isolated population of the nominate form in Southwest Asia apparently breeds only in lower Iraq, but occurs in winter in neighbouring southwestern Iran. Stragglers have been recorded in Kuwait and Yemen.

2.2. Population

Two migratory populations are recognized.

- Population in subsaharan Africa: Minimum of 200,000 birds; apparently stable (Rose & Scott 1993).
- Southwest Asia (Iran/Iraq): 200; declining (Rose & Scott 1993).

Widespread and common to very common in Africa south of the Sahara, with colonies of up to 5,000 pairs. No longer occurs in Egypt, although abundant there in the past, e.g. 1,500,000 birds were entombed in the catacombs at Saqqara, and apparently common until the early 19th century, but already almost extinct by 1850. During the African Waterfowl Censuses of July 1992 and January 1993, the highest national totals were from Burundi (283), Cameroon (907), Kenya (272), Niger (291), Sudan (3,006), Zambia (639) and Zimbabwe (554) (Taylor 1993).

Formerly a fairly common resident and partial migrant in the extensive marshes between Amara and Fao in Mesopotamia, Iraq, with a part of the

population spending the winter in the floodplain wetlands of the Karun and Dez Rivers in neighbouring southwestern Iran. Only two breeding records are known, both near Qurna, Iraq, in the early 1920s (Ticehurst *et al.* 1921-22; Ticehurst *et al.*, 1926). The species was still common in the Haur Al Hammar and Haur Al Hawizeh marshes in Iraq in 1956 (Maxwell 1957), but surveys in the late 1960s and 1970s suggested that the species had by then become very scarce, with the total population possibly numbering no more than 200 birds (Scott & Carp 1982; Scott 1992). There do not appear to have been any records of the species in Iraq since the early 1980s (K.Y. Al-Dabbagh, *in litt.*).

Between 50 and 100 birds wintered regularly in the Karun and Dez River marshes in Iran in the 1970s (Scott 1992), and small numbers continue to appear in southwestern Iran in winter, *e.g.* 30 in January 1989 (Scott & Rose 1989), 35 in January 1990 (Perennou *et al.* 1990) and 16 in January 1992 (Perennou and Mundkur, 1992). Although a few birds have been recorded in the Karun river marshes during the summer months, the species is not known to have bred in Iran.

2.3. Habitat

Occurs in a variety of wetland and dryland habitats; mainly around the margins of inland freshwater wetlands and on wet grassland, cultivated fields, sewage works, coastal lagoons, intertidal mud-flats and offshore islands. Also occurs in human environments such as farm yards, large gardens, abattoirs and dumps on the outskirts of town. Sometimes far from water, particularly in recently burnt areas. Nests in small to very large colonies, often with other species, in trees or bushes, or on the bare ground on rocky islands (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992).

2.4. Migrations

Nomadic or migratory. Regularly undertakes movements of up to several hundred kilometres to breed during the rains, with birds north of the equator moving northwards, and those south of the equator moving southwards. Both populations return to humid areas nearer the equator at the end of the rains or early in the dry season. Birds ringed in South Africa have been recovered 1,000-1,500 km away in Angola and Zambia. The Iraqi breeding population appears to be mainly sedentary, although small numbers (up to 100) regularly winter in the floodplain wetlands of the Karun and Dez Rivers in Khuzestan Province of southwestern Iran, with a few birds (non-breeders) remaining there throughout the summer.

3. **Threat data**

3.1. Direct threats to the population

Hunting pressure has undoubtedly been a major cause for the decline in numbers in Iraq. Maxwell (1957) noted that *T. aethiopicus* was a favourite quarry species of hunters in the Mesopotamian Marshes, and found the bird to be very wary.

3.2. Habitat destruction

Extensive drainage of wetlands for agricultural land has presumably contributed to the decline in numbers in southern Iraq, but is unlikely to have been the principal factor as the species had already become very scarce by the late 1970s, when a large proportion of the marshes remained more or less intact (Scott & Carp 1982). In Africa, the species is far less dependent on wetlands than many other large waterbirds, and does not as yet seem to have been affected by wetland loss and degradation. It readily adapts to man-modified environments, especially rice fields, and often occurs around human habitation, foraging at rubbish tips, in large gardens and even in city parks.

3.3. Indirect threats

The widespread use of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals in and around the Mesopotamian Marshes in Iraq may have contributed to the decline in numbers.

3.4. Threats connected especially with migrations

None known.

3.5. National and international utilization

Intensively hunted for food in the Mesopotamian Marshes of Iraq, but now on the verge of extinction there. There may be some casual hunting of the species in parts of Africa, but details are lacking.

4. **Protection status and needs**

4.1. National protection status

In Africa, fully protected under national legislation in Benin, Botswana, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Swaziland and Tanzania; partially protected as a game species in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Sudan and Zaire.

4.2. International protection status

Threskiornis aethiopicus is listed in Appendix III of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) for Ghana.

4.3. Additional protection needs

The African population is considered to have a favourable conservation status, and is not in need of any additional special protection measures at the present time.

The Middle Eastern population of Threskiornis aethiopicus is listed in the category 'Threatened' in the Draft Management Plan for the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds, because it is a biogeographical population which is thought to number less than 10,000 individuals. This population is in urgent need of

attention as its principal wetland habitats in southern Iraq are in the process of being drained for agriculture. It seems unlikely, however, that any remedial measures could be taken in the foreseeable future, and extinction of this tiny, isolated population now seems inevitable.

5. **Range States**

See attached table.

6. **Comments from Range States**

7. **Additional remarks**

8. **References**

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Taxon: <i>Threskiornis aethiopicus aethiopicus</i>		
Population		
(a) Sub-Saharan Africa		
(b) Iran/Iraq		
State	Pop.	Status
Angola	a	Sr
Benin	a	Wsr
Botswana	a	S
Burundi	a	Wr
Cameroon	a	Wrs
Central African Republic	a	Wrs
Chad	a	Sr
Congo	a	Wr
Cote d'Ivoire	a	Wrs
Djibouti	a	S
Equatorial Guinea	a	Wr
Ethiopia	a	Wrs
Gabon	a	Wr
Gambia	a	S
Ghana	a	Wrs
Guinea	a	Swr
Guinea-Bissau	a	S
Iran	b	W
Iraq	b	Sr
Kenya	a	Wr
Kuwait	b	V
Lesotho	a	S
Liberia	a	Wr
Malawi	a	S
Mali	a	S
Mauritania	a	S
Mozambique	a	S
Namibia	a	S
Niger	a	S
Nigeria	a	Swr
Rwanda	a	Wr
Senegal	a	S

Somalia	a	Wrs
South Africa	a	S
Sudan	a	Srw
Swaziland	a	S
Tanzania	a	Wsr
Togo	a	Wsr
Uganda	a	Wr
Yemen	a	V
Zaire	a	Wrs
Zambia	a	S
Zimbabwe	a	S

Key to Status	
S/s Breeding summer visitor	R/r Resident
W/w Winter visitor	V Vagrant
P/p Passage migrant	? Status uncertain
Upper case = primary status Lower case = secondary status	