

QUICK NOTES > Compiled by Edgar R. Batte



birding in Uganda
With over 1,000 birds, Uganda is a haven for birding. The marabou stork is another of many. The Mabamba Bay Wetland, Lutembe Beach area, Queen Elizabeth National Park, Kapkwai Forest Exploration Centre, Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary, are some of the areas to go birding. Uganda is home to the shoebill, Bee-eaters, robins, sunbirds and barbets and many more birds.



useful garbage collectors
Be it in the game park, your city, town or neighbourhood, the marabou is actually a useful resident because it rids its environment, and yours, of filth. By being the common folks at pits and garbage heaps, they feed on the refuse of community and in effect help on reducing on waste. The marabous can eat up to one kilo of garbage a day.



behaviour
Like most storks, the marabou is gregarious and a colonial breeder. In the dry season (when food is more readily available as the pools shrink) it builds a tree nest in which two or three eggs are laid. It is known to be quite ill-tempered. It also indulges in bill-rattling courtship displays. The throat sac is also used to make various noises at that time.

A peek at Uganda's invaluable scavenger marabou stork

PHOTOS BY EDGAR R. BATTE



EXTRA RESIDENT. They saunter, peck at stony ground for insects then proceed to the garbage heaps for a more "nutritious" kill. Marabou storks are a common sight in Uganda, writes **EDGAR R. BATTE**

Kampala, and many towns because over the years, they have combed streets from above, mostly in tree branches and streetlight poles.

They are the almost invisible residents whose presence in tree branches, at garbage deposits, rubbish pits and such environs is common and a given. But that is not to say that you will not recognise them.

They are ugly, so much so that only a

mother's kindness would elicit description of beauty, what with naked head and neck and stork as so long as it emphasises the bird's scavenger ways.

Though cowards, because they will run away when you draw close, they have unflinching eyes that seem to send a warning to enemies from a distance. At feeding time, all care is lost and the marabou feeds by dipping the beak and sometimes immersing the body into the meal so seeing clotted blood on its stork and feathers is no surprise as it enjoys a meal.

In Kampala, they enjoy hanging out at the city abattoir where they are assured of some refuse from the cattle and goats slaughtered. True to their nature, they scavenge for the fresh and clotted blood and other parts thrown away after slaughtering the animals and at feeding time, they are joined by the Hadada ibis.

The two also enjoy spending time in wetlands and many times in not so clean



Marabous love concrete surfaces.

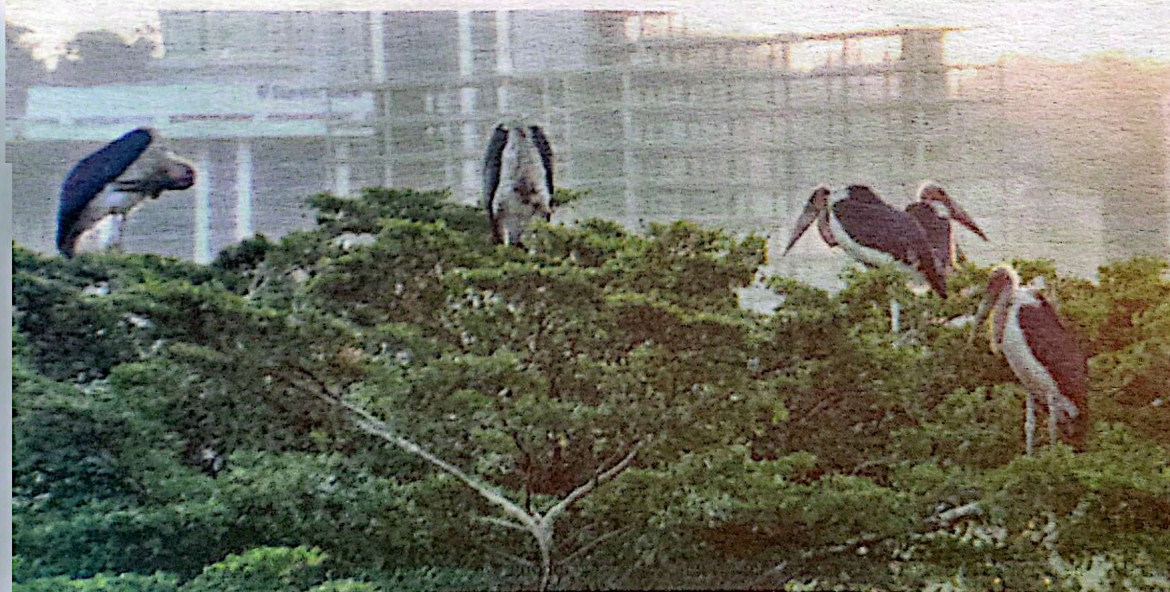
At a glance

In a story this reporter did for *Africa Review*, bird enthusiast Hebert Byaruhanga, Managing Director Bird Uganda Safaris Ltd says marabou storks have been around since time immemorial. "In the 1960s they were not in towns. They recently came because of the availability of food," he said. Research by Professor Derrick Pomeroy indicates that the number of storks in the country has gradually grown over the years.

Marabou storks tend to take time off and relax after a day's work.

They walk majestically, taking moments to lower their beaks to scoop some insects out of the stony ground. They then slowly head to a garbage heap, and settle there for some time, feeding and probably gossiping about the folly of people who dispose of more paper than edible stuff.

The junk is metres away from the Lincoln Flats at Makerere University, a busy spot located near the Senate building which is a busy area with many students going about different engagements. None of the university students is bothered about the ziconiidae, as the family of marabou storks is called. The marabou are no stranger to



areas, for example feeding on snails or other dwellers in clogged water holes, ponds and swamps. In Mbarara, your writer saw a couple of marabous too, feeding and some taking siestas in grasslands or pondering over unknown issues at electric poles.

In Kampala, these ugly residents raise families up in nests in tree branches and on Sundays when the city is less congested, your photographer finds enough freedom and room to appreciate what a birding zone it is.

For instance, you get to appreciate that beyond the naughty behaviour of dropping their white droppings onto people's cars and foreheads, the marabous enjoy family time during which they groom themselves, clean nests and more. Like other city folks, Sundays are more for 'me time', at home, when they also take a break from scavenging for survival in the city. I like the marabous, and respectfully so because they must have been resident in Kampala longer than I have lived in it.