

Do Black-necked Storks breed in the Hunter Valley? A comment on Clancy & Kingsford (2015)

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Abstract. The claim of Clancy & Kingsford (2015) that a pair of Black-necked Storks *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* bred at Hexham Swamp, Hunter Valley, New South Wales, in 2014 may be incorrect. This species, which is classified as Endangered in NSW, has never been confirmed to breed anywhere in the Hunter Valley. However, in late 2015 a pair with two fledged young was recorded regularly. Possibly this constitutes the first breeding record for the Hunter Valley, although it is not known where the pair nested.

In a recent paper on Black-necked Storks *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* in New South Wales (NSW), Clancy & Kingsford (2015) stated that a pair bred at Hexham Swamp in the Hunter Valley in 2014. The statement appears to have arisen from misinterpretation of comments by a local birdwatcher. Although the pair was recorded very regularly at Hexham Swamp in 2014, breeding was not confirmed, nor was it confirmed that the pair even attempted to breed (Stuart 2015).

On many occasions between July and December 2014, observers noted the presence of the pair of Storks in a distant tree alongside a structure which possibly was a nest. The tree was situated on a small rise in the middle of Hexham Swamp at least 1 km from any firm ground and almost 2 km from the area most often visited by birdwatchers. It could never be confirmed that the structure was a nest. During the entire period, there were a few reports of a bird sitting on the 'nest' but those distant sightings were shrouded in uncertainty. At no stage were there any sightings of a chick or of adults bringing food to the 'nest'. Furthermore, there were no sightings subsequently of the pair with a juvenile bird.

The Black-necked Stork is classified as Endangered in NSW and it is important that its conservation status in the

Hunter Valley be correctly documented. Since 1930, when it was first reported in the area (Enright 1933), there has never been a breeding record for the Black-necked Stork in the Hunter Valley. There is no confirmed evidence that the species bred in the Hunter Valley in 2014. However, in late November 2015 a pair with two juveniles appeared at Hexham Swamp, with regular records of them in the ensuing weeks by me and many other observers. Possibly this constitutes the first breeding record, although it was not known where the pair nested and the young birds appeared to be feeding independently.

References

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