

The background is a rich, abstract painting of a rural landscape. It features several trees with rounded, colorful canopies in shades of red, blue, yellow, and green. The ground is depicted with broad, expressive brushstrokes in warm tones of orange, yellow, and red. In the mid-ground, there are several buildings, some with red walls and others with more muted colors. The overall style is expressive and colorful, with a focus on bold shapes and a wide range of hues.

DISCOVER ARMENIA

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DISCOVER ARMENIA

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Three nestlings - Photo by Lusine Stepanyan © Acopian Center for the Environment, AUA
These three nestlings are almost ready to fly.

Come, White Stork. Gentle White Stork."

These are words from a famous Armenian folk song. In Armenia as well as in other countries, Storks live close to humans, attracting the attention of people and stimulating the creation of songs, lyrics, legends, and myths...

Do you know that Storks always sacrifice one of their nestlings?" This question was asked by an old man who was looking at me with a sly glance, like he knows much more than he tells. People who live near Storks' nests are often noting some interesting facts and they give their own explanations.

This particular case proves this point. It is true that Storks often throw one (sometimes even two) nestling from the nest, but they do it in order to bring the number of nestlings in accordance with the food availability. Nestlings of Storks are not as aggressive towards each other as nestlings of raptors: they do not kill each other if there is a

shortage of food. That is why parents throw the weakest nestling out of the nest, if food is lacking.

Usually, White Storks live in a good and close relationship with people. It is hard to believe that

Nests on roof - Photo by Hayk Harutyunyan ©
Acopian Center for the Environment, AUA
Nests, which block drainage pipe: the source of conflict between storks and human.



this huge bird is not afraid of humans, while his close relative – the Black Stork, breeds in very dense forests far from settlements and is very sensitive towards human disturbance. Unlike that one, White Storks make nests on pylons or roofs and often feed in the gardens very close to humans. This habit makes it easier for us to conduct a nation-wide monitoring of White Storks in whole Armenia. Nest-neighbors (local people who live close to the Stork nest) are recording important Stork data on the special calendars, which have been provided for them each fall since 2006. The data is used by our Center for understanding population trends and for conclusions about the health of wetlands – the main habitat of White Storks. In addition we inspire nest-neighbors to celebrate White Stork’s day in Armenia every year.

However, sometimes there are conflicts when Storks place the nest on the roof, thus blocking drainage of rainwater. This can cause severe damage to the plaster and house and angers the householder. But our Center has a solution for this problem. So far we have provided 11 nest-platforms to schools and private houses in a pilot project, and we plan to relocate all those nests of White Storks which are placed on roofs in the long term.

According to the last count there are 601 pairs and 39 single individuals of White Storks in Armenia. Most of the population lives in Ararat valley, and just some little groups occupy areas in Shirak, Lori and Vayots Dzor regions.



Nest neighbor - Photo by Karen Aghababyan © Acopian Center for the Environment, AUA
This young and very enthusiastic boy is properly filling out the White Stork Calendar every year.

Do you know that our Storks did not fly away from here for the last winter?” This is a question which we hear more and more often from local villagers. Usually, Storks from Europe and the Caucasus migrate to Africa and stay there over winter. However, starting from the 1970s, they started to winter in Armenia. Now the wintering population consists of about 200-250 individuals, which stay in Armenia during the whole winter and do not migrate. What is the reason to this change in migratory behavior? Most probably it is availability of food, which became possible due to several reasons. Firstly, poultry farms in Ararat valley support storks with food (waste of poultry production) year-round.. Secondly, milder winter temperatures in Armenia over the last years cause water sources



Nest Platform - Photo by Levan Janoian © Acopian Center for the Environment, AUA
Nest platform allows people and storks live in mutually beneficial atmosphere. © Acopian Center for the Environment, AUA
Nests, which block drainage pipe: the source of conflict between storks and human.

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to not freeze entirely, thus supplying food sources even in winter. And thirdly, the number of fish-farms is increasing, and these also can provide an additional food supply.

Storks always have two nestlings” This flippant statement of a local teenager shocked me. It is possible that Storks at several nesting sites have two nestlings in a number of years, but would not always have two nestlings, because the food amount available varies from year to year and a female will always produce as many eggs as she can. In fact, Storks can have 1 to 5 nestlings, but usually they have 2-4 and these numbers are determined by the availability of food. Then the nestlings are fed in the nest until July, and after that the nestlings fly off and stay in Africa for four years, only to return to Armenia upon maturation. After maturation, the nestlings come back to Eurasia, trying to find a breeding place and a mate.

This is the same stork, which always comes back to his nest” This is another naive statement which I often hear. Sometimes it is even hard to tell people apart, so how can we be sure that a Stork looks different for us? In any case, the above statement is not true. Based on data from ringed Storks, scientists figured out that Storks change their nesting site and even mate pretty often. Studying the White Stork population in Armenia, we wish to understand how many of the Storks which migrate to Africa, are actually coming back to Armenia. For that purpose we are ringing our Storks’ nestlings with special rings. Every year about a hundred of



White Stork Day Celebration Hovtashat - Photo by Levan Janoian
© Acopian Center for the Environment, AUA
Annual celebration of White Stork’s Day in Hovtashat village.

ringed nestlings fly from Armenia, and we hope that they will come back some day and will make their nest on top of a poplar tree, marking the beginning of spring and continuing to inspire local people to create new songs, poems, legends and myths...

In 2007, the White Stork Conservation Program in Armenia received a Whitley Award donated by Friends of Whitley Fund for Nature – the British top conservation award. This award helps Acopian Center for the Environment to study and to protect the species and the wetland habitats.

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Stork in flight - Photo by Maro Kochinyan © Acopian Center for the Environment, AUA
Storks more soar and glide rather than fly with flapping flight.