



HAMERKOP

CICONIIFORMES

Family: Scopidae

Genus: *Scopus*

Species: *umbretta*



Range: Africa south of the Sahara except parts of the Kalahari Desert, Madagascar and southwest Arabia

Habitat: Marshy shorelines (lakes, rivers, estuaries), hunting along the water edge.

Niche: largely diurnal some crepuscular, carnivorous, aquatic/arboreal

Wild diet: Including insects, fish, crabs frogs, rodents and similar small animals.

Zoo diet: Fish, mice

Life Span: (Wild) 20 years
(Captivity)

Sexual dimorphism:

Location in SF Zoo: African Aviary

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Hamerkops are small wading birds. They are brown all over with a thick, long, black bill with legs being about the size of a Night Heron with a long shaggy crest. The shape of its head with a curved bill and crest at the back is reminiscent of a hammer, hence its name. Its plumage is a drab brown all over. They have short legs with partially webbed toes and a short tail and long wings.

Juveniles similar to adults in coloration; chicks have grey down and broad, blunt bills.

Weight: 14.5 – 15.5 lb

Length: 21 - 24 inches

Wingspan: 37 inches

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Appears not to be threatened at this time. They are protected by native superstition. They are thought to have supernatural powers and are the bearer of the tidings of death. The greatest threats to this species are the degradation of the water supply and loss of protective status.

HAMERKOP

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

The Hamerkop is quiet when alone but has a noisy call when in groups. Their vocalizations consist of crackles and a shrill flight call of "wek-wek-wek". Normally it is seen alone or as a pair.

These birds stalk their prey by wading through shallow water and striking forward with their bill. They deposit the prey on solid ground before eating it. They also may probe mud for invertebrates.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

The Hamerkop is very well known for its huge domed nest. It builds a huge haystack-like stick nest (largest 6.5 x 6.5 feet) in a tree fork, normally over water. The nest can take 3 to 6 weeks to construct and is worked on by the pair. The nest is reused each year, getting larger and larger as the Hamerkop renovates it. The entrance to the nest remains at the bottom, to deter potential predators. It is typically abandoned after a few months. These birds breed all year round in E. Africa.

Mating occurs at a completed nest site, using displays similar to those seen during a ceremony called "false mounting" where crests are raised, wings fluttered and a chorus of cries is continuous for several minutes and one bird mounts another without copulating.

Incubation:	28 - 32 days	Sexual Maturity:	
# of eggs:	3 - 6	Fledging:	50 days

MISCELLANEOUS

The English alternate name is "hammer-head." The word "Hamerkop" is the equivalent in the Afrikaans language (thus of Dutch-German origins). Hamerkop is often seen the way it sounds - Hammerkop.

Hamerkops are closely related to the storks (in the Order Ciconiiformes) although recent DNA evidence places them closer to the herons and flamingos (in the Order Charadriiformes)

Sources:

Handbook of the Birds of the World Vol 1 © 1992 Lynx Ediciones p 430 - 435

<http://www.sfzoo.org>

<http://montereybay.com/creagrus/hamerkop.html>

<http://www.philadelphiapark.org/zoo/Meet-Our-Animals/Birds/Flamingos/Hammerkop.htm>

Updated 10/01

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