

SHOEBILL

Balaeniceps rex



Order: Ciconiiformes Family: Balaenicipitidae

A unique bird the Shoebill shows characteristics of three different families : storks, herons and pelicans. As a result the taxonomy of this species is still being debated. It is the only species in its family.

The shoebill is a solitary animal that prefers flooded marshes with dense vegetation. If food is plentiful it is non migratory but will travel if its preferred feeding grounds dry up. The shoebill gets its name for its large and distinctive bill. The bill can measure up to 61 cm (24 in) long and 10 cm (4 in) wide. The nest is built on the ground or floating platform and both parents care for the eggs. Unlike other wading birds the shoebill hunts by sight rather than tactile hunting with its bill. It feeds mainly on larger fish especially lungfish.

Despite its wide range the species is found in limited areas. The population is declining due to habitat loss.

Range: Africa- Sudan to Tanzania
Size: 110-140 cm (43-55 in)
Weight: ♂ 4-7 kg (8.8- 15.4lb)
♀: 4-7 kg (8.8- 15.4 lb)
Wingspan : 260 cm (102 in)
Diet: fish mainly lungfish
Eggs: 1-3
Incubation : 30 days
Fledging: 105 days
Sexual maturity: 3 years
Nest: Floating platform
Habitat: freshwater swamp
Activity: Crepuscular
Social: Solitary
Breeding: monogamous
Movement : Sedentary
IUCN: Vulnerable
Subspecies: Monotypic
Longevity: Captive- 36 yrs