

EUROPE-AFRICA EXPEDITION

Following Endangered White Storks across Two Continents

From January to July 2007, Lorie Karnath carried Wings WorldQuest Flag #14 across Europe and Africa as she and her expedition team followed the migration route of the European White Stork. Lorie and her team wanted to see how populations of this magnificent bird were faring and to document the environmental obstacles faced along its route. The previous August, they had documented nests in two German villages, where baby birds were banded, and watched storks leave for the migration.



Lorie holds Wings WWQ Flag #14 at Ruehstaedt, Germany, where signs show distances to nearby stork colonies and migration destinations.

EXPEDITION TEAM

Expedition Leader:
Lorie Karnath

Team Leader:
Robert Toethenmund

Participants:
Christoph von Rohr (lead)
Otto Roethenmund
Dieter Rosenkranz,
Si Rosenkranz

Advisor:
Renate Poeppel

Artist:
Enrique Martinez-Celaya

This year's work began in the Elbe River Valley of Northern Germany, an ecologically pristine area where villagers cherish the storks and care for their nests. Lorie and the team then journeyed to observe stork nesting sites and resting places across Europe, the Straits of Gibraltar, Morocco's Atlas Mountains, and down to South Africa. Along the migration route, they worked with environmental and wildlife groups, which banded the storks and ensured that bands sighted were recorded. They returned to Germany in May to watch parent storks arrive home to their same nests.



Newly arrived parents atop nest in March 2007 in Gunmen, Germany



How the White Stork navigates 10,000 km back to its nest remains a mystery

EXPEDITION INSIGHTS

The journey gave them a vivid understanding of what White Storks encounter and why they are endangered. Increased breeding populations exist in Northern Europe because the birds are revered and considered good omens. Declining numbers in southern Europe and Africa are due to hunting and the reduction of their insect food supplies from drought, overgrazing, and crop pesticide use. Migrating storks that survive their return to Europe are bedraggled and undernourished.

To be sure that storks have enough food during their breeding season, Lorie's team is working with Deutsche Umwelthilfe and providing financial support for increased wetlands acquisition near the German villages where storks live.

ABOUT LORIE KARNATH

Lorie Karnath is an entrepreneur who serves on numerous international boards to help foster science education. In addition to her many international scientific activities, Lorie is writing a children's book (with artist Enrique Martinez-Celaya) about the life and journey of the White Stork. She hopes that the stork's international adventures will inspire young explorers to think about the discoveries that are possible by investigating the wildlife and environment of their own communities.

“It is amazing to think how much more of the world any of these storks have seen in comparison to the villagers who care for them each breeding season. The storks bring an international context to these remote village boundaries.”

—Lorie Karnath, commenting on the German Wendlands area



WHO

Lorie Karnath

WHAT

Follow the migration route of the European White Stork to assess population stability

WHERE

Germany, Spain, Gibraltar, Morocco, and South Africa

WHY

To document the declining numbers of White Storks and pinpoint the causes



White Storks at home atop the palace walls of Marrakesh, Morocco



Ruehstaedt villagers remove plastic and other harmful debris from stork nest.