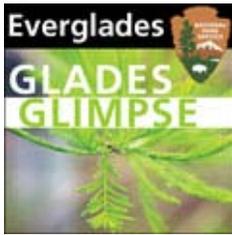


Everglades National Park Podcast – Glades Glimpse Video Series



Transcript: *Woodstork Shuffle*

Produced: May 2008

Shuffle, shuffle, snap, walk, shuffle, shuffle, snap, shuffle, wing out, shuffle, snap...what is that wood stork doing? When the wood stork feeds it looks like he might look like a bald headed bird wearing pink slippers and dancing to his own beat. But he is actually feeling around in the water for his food. The wood stork stands in water several inches deep, opens his beak and begins his shuffling dance.

The wood stork is a touch feeder meaning that he uses his beak to feel for his food. His long beak has little sensory receptors that trigger the beak to snap closed when they touch prey. The reflex is so fast that it snaps closed in less than .03 seconds—that's faster than we can blink! This is one of the fastest reaction times for a vertebrate animal.

To help fish swim towards his beak, the wood stork shuffles his pink colored feet in the murky water. Motionless fish are startled, swimming off and bumping into the long open beak. Snap...the wood stork's beak closes and he quickly jerks his head back swallowing the fish.

The wood stork is very well adapted to finding his prey. Since he doesn't need to see his food, only feel it, wood storks will often stand in water thick with plants or murky water where the fish can't see his dark bald head looming over the water.

With as much water as there is in South Florida you would think the wood stork could live everywhere. However, the wood stork is dependent on freshwater and estuary environments with water levels between 6-20 inches deep allowing his beak to feel his prey. During the dry season, these shallow waters trap high concentrations of fish providing the perfect environment for the wood storks and their hungry young.

The wood stork is endangered and populations have dropped drastically since man has controlled the water levels through canals and levees here in South Florida. Over half of the natural Everglades ecosystem has been drained and the control of the water levels is not providing heavy enough concentrations of fish. This proves to be disastrous to nesting pairs and leaves the helpless young in the nest starving to death.

Luckily, South Florida and Everglades National Park are working to help restore a more natural water flow through the historic ecosystem. In turn, we hope this will help this pink-slipper wearing dancer to return to a healthy population in the Everglades.