 Reading time: 4 min.

The white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) is a large bird, unmistakable for its tapering red beak, long neck, very long legs, and predominantly white plumage, with black feathers on the wings. It is migratory by nature, and its arrival in spring in many countries of Europe is considered a good omen.
As soon as they arrive, these birds start to make or rebuild their nests in high places, often in the same place.

In the past, when there were no electricity grid support poles, the highest places were the covered chimneys of houses, and the warmest ones were preferred by storks. And the houses that were also warm in the spring were those where a newborn baby was in need of a propitious environment. Hence the legend of the stork carrying babies, a legend that has become a symbol. In fact, even today, greeting cards to new mothers feature a stork in flight, with a bundle tied to its beak.

The Creator endowed storks with superior instincts, making them noble birds. And they are so faithful to the task assigned to them by nature that they deserve to be placed among the first in the “book of creation”.



The first thing that strikes one is that they tend to be monogamous: once a couple is formed, they stay together for life. Sure, there will be squabbles in their existence, but these never lead to separation.
They almost always return to the same nest, rebuilding and enriching it. They never tire of repairing it every year and improving it, even if this requires much effort. And the nest is always high up, on chimneys, electric poles or bell towers, because they want to protect their offspring from wild animals.
Although no one has taught them, they manage to build wonderful nests that can exceed two metres in diameter with twigs and also with other materials they find within their flying range, even with textiles and plastics; they do not destroy nature, but recycle.
The female lays three to six eggs, not worrying about how she will support her young. Once the eggs are laid, she never neglects her duty to brood, even if she has to face bad times. If the nests are close to roads, the constant noise of cars, the vibrations caused by heavy vehicles or their dazzling lights at night does not make them leave. When the sun gets scorching hot, the stork opens its wings a little or

moves occasionally to cool off, but does not try to get into the shade. When it is cold, especially at night, it does everything it can not to leave its eggs outside too much. When a strong wind comes, it does not let itself be carried away and does everything to keep still. When it rains, she does not take cover to protect herself from the water. And when even a hailstorm comes, it stoically resists at the risk of losing its life, but does not stop doing its duty.
And this behaviour is wonderful if we remember the basic instincts that the Creator has left to every living being. Even in the most basic organisms, the single-celled ones, we find four basic instincts: nutrition, excretion, preservation of the individual (self-defence) and preservation of the species (reproduction). And when an organism has to choose whether to give priority to one of these instincts, the preservation of the individual, self-defence, always prevails.
In the case of the stork, the fact that it stays put to protect its eggs even in storms, even when there is a hailstorm endangering its life, shows that the instinct of preservation of the species becomes stronger than that of preservation of the individual. It is as if this bird is aware that the liquid in those eggs is not a generated product from which she can separate, but that inside the egg is a life that she must protect at all costs.

The female alternates with the male while brooding. The male is ready to give his consort a change to allow her to get food and get some exercise. And this for the entire time, just over a month, until the eggs hatch and the new creatures come to light. After this period, the parents continue to take turns to provide a warm place for the young, to feed them for another two months until they begin to leave the nest. And up to three weeks they feed them with regurgitated food because their young are unable to feed themselves otherwise. They are content with what they find: insects, frogs, fish, rodents, lizards, snakes, crustaceans, worms, etc.; they make no demands for food. And by satisfying this need to feed, they participate in the natural balance, reducing agricultural pests such as grasshoppers.
They ensure the survival of their chicks by defending them from predatory sparrows, hawks and eagles, because they know that they are incapable of recognising aggressors or even defending themselves.
The young, once they have grown wings, learn to fly and look for food, and gradually leave their nest, as if they are aware that there is no more physical space for them, as the nest is limited in size. They do not live by weighing on their parents, but they get busy. They are non-possessive birds; they do not mark their territory, but coexist peacefully with others.
In this way, young storks begin to live as adults, even if they are not yet adults. In

fact, to begin to reproduce they must wait their time, until they are 4 years old, when they join forces in pairs with another bird of the same temperament, but of the opposite sex, and begin the adventure of their lives. For this they will have to learn that in order to survive they must migrate even very long distances, struggling, seeking their opportunities to live in one place during the summer and in another during the winter. And to do so safely, they will have to associate with other storks which have the same nature and interest.

The instincts of these creatures have not escaped human observation. Since ancient times, the stork has been the symbol of love between parents and children. And it is the bird that best represents the ancient bond between man and nature.
The white stork has a mild character and for this reason it is loved by people and is well liked everywhere; the Abbey of Chiaravalle even wanted it in its coat of arms next to the pastoral baculus and mitre.
Today it is difficult to see it in nature. It is not often you see a stork’s nest and even less so up close. But someone came up with the idea of using technology to show the life of these birds by placing a live video camera next to a nest on a road. Watching to learn. The “book of nature” has so much to teach us….

