

BLANESTO

the black-necked stork



Enviro-Stories

Enviro-Stories is a literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by Peekdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area.

envirostories.com.au

MidCoast Council

The MidCoast ranges from beaches to mountains over an area of 10,000 square kilometres. The MidCoast is home to the Gathang speaking people from Biripi, Worimi and Guringai.

The MidCoast region has a large, unique mix of environments – coastal systems, estuarine wetlands and mangrove forests, rainforests, freshwater rivers and wetlands, open grasslands, woodlands and eucalypt forests. This diverse range of environments has led to a wide array of plants and animals calling the area home. Unfortunately, due to alteration of the landscape, introduction of feral animals and changing climatic conditions, many of the regions plants and animals have become vulnerable and their survival is under threat.

midcoast.nsw.gov.au

Blanesto, the black-necked stork

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In a place not far from here, a mother black-necked stork told her newly hatched chicks a story about their history – a story from long ago...

Once upon a time the swamp and wetlands in these parts flourished. Many of our kind inhabited this country, making their homes in these magnificent waterways.

They lived happily and harmoniously.





The black-necked stork

The black-necked stork is a special bird – it's the only stork that lives in Australia. It can grow as tall as 1.3 metres, with wings that stretch out to about 2 metres wide.

Its head and neck shine a glossy black with a hint of green, while its body is mostly white with black patches on the wings and tail. You can't miss its long, bright red legs that are perfect for wading through wetlands in search of food!

Over the years, humans came along, wanting to share our beautiful country and make it their home as well.

As more and more of the human's came, they made changes that were disastrous to nature's delicate balance. They cleared the land and put in things called farms, where they grew the large amounts of food they needed. They dug huge holes in the ground called mines, where they harvested the land's natural resources. They even built things called powerlines along our flight paths – wires that were hard to see and very dangerous to our kind.

But the worst thing of all was how they polluted and disrupted our waterways.





Where do black-necked storks live?

Black-necked storks are mostly found in the coastal and sub-coastal parts of northern and eastern Australia. They love wetlands – places like floodplains, swamps, and deep, permanent waterholes. In the north they're still quite common, but in the southeast they're much rarer and even considered endangered.

Some humans even blocked the swamps and wetlands from the natural ebbs and flows of the tides, causing the lands to dry up. Without enough water the plants and trees died, along with our ancestors' food sources.

The black-necked storks had no choice but to leave. But, where were they meant to go? These wetlands were all they had ever known! They flew and flew trying to find somewhere, anywhere, to live.





How black-necked storks survive

Black-necked storks are perfectly built for life in the wetlands. Their long legs help them wade through deep water, and their strong bills are great for catching fish and other prey. Their striking feathers also help them blend into their surroundings.

These birds usually spend time alone or with a small family group, but sometimes they gather in bigger flocks when there's plenty of food around. They don't travel far and mostly stay in the same area. They only move short distances when water levels change.

To communicate, black-necked storks make deep grunting sounds and also clack or snap their bills together.

Sadly, many of our kind did not survive.

Around these parts, humans took over more and more of the land. Their population flourished while many native species were suffering. They called it "progress," but to us, it was pure destruction.

Soon, storks were driven to the brink of extinction!





What do black-necked storks eat?

Black-necked storks are carnivores, which means they eat other animals. Their favourite foods include eels, fish, frogs, insects and crustaceans. They use their long, sword-like beaks to spear their prey, and they're quick hunters – sometimes they lunge forward or even leap into the air to catch a meal!

They'll also snack on snakes, turtles and other small reptiles when they can find them.

After many years of harmful actions, when our home was on the point of no return, along came some helpful humans who began to notice the destruction they had caused.

Slowly but surely, more and more helpful humans recognised that unless they acted, then everything unique about the area would be lost. The helpful humans came together with volunteers, community groups, experts, Traditional Custodians and government agencies, all working hard to repair and restore the land.





How black-necked storks raise their young

Before they mate, black-necked storks perform a special courtship dance. They bow their heads, clap their bills and move together in a graceful, dance-like display.

They usually breed from March to May and build their nests high up in tall trees to keep their eggs safe. The parents take turns incubating the eggs, which hatch after about 30–35 days.

Once the chicks, called fledglings, grow their feathers, they stay near the nest for almost a year while they learn how to survive on their own.

They reopened natural waterways, removed weeds, planted stork-friendly trees and stabilised waterway banks. They put in measures to limit their pollution, and some humans even built tripod nests to give us safe places to live.

They made the land habitable again so plants would thrive and the wetlands could once more become a safe-haven for animals to return.

Helpful humans continued to nurture the lands and protect returning animal species. They made rules and put laws in place to ensure that unhelpful humans could never destroy our home again.





What puts black-necked storks in danger?

Black-necked storks face many threats in their natural environment and most of them are caused by people. Powerlines are dangerous because the birds can get tangled or electrocuted. They are also affected when their wetland homes are lost due to farming, towns, or mining.

Humans can disturb them in other ways too, such as blocking or draining natural waterways and overfishing, which means there is less food for the storks to eat. These challenges make it harder for the birds to survive and thrive.

So look around, young chicks, and see for yourselves how helpful humans can mend the mistakes of the past.

What you see now is proof that humans still care and will continue to look after us and our home.





Did you know?

- The black-necked stork is the only stork species found in Australia.
- They are commonly called Jabiru which is a word used by some Aboriginal Peoples.
- A group of black-necked storks is known as a muster.
- Adult females have bright yellow eyes, while adult males have dark brown eyes.



Ten years later, the wetlands are a thriving community of diverse plant and animal species. Many helpful humans visit but they stay in their own space and admire us from afar.

We are so grateful to live in such a beautiful and protected part of the world.



Harrington Public School
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