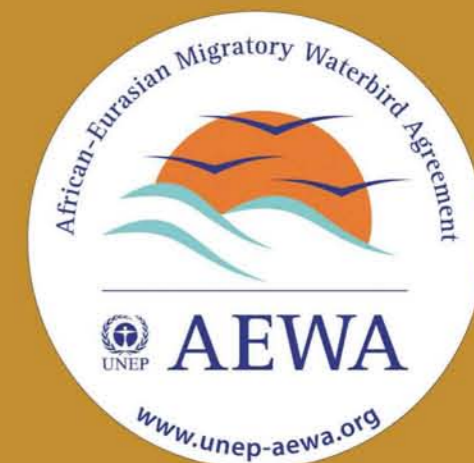


# Madagascar Pond Heron

*Ardeola idae*

The Madagascar Pond Heron *Ardeola idae* is a seasonal migrant within Africa. In its breeding plumage (photo below) this small heron is unmistakably snowy white with a crested crown, the distinctively azure blue bill has a black tip and the legs become rose pink. Non-breeding plumages (photo bottom right) are less distinctive and very similar to other pond herons, making it difficult to identify. It feeds on fish, insects and small invertebrates.



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## Conservation status and threats

Unfortunately the species has been declining continuously over the last 50 years in all colonies, especially on the high plateau of Madagascar, and it was considered to be 'Endangered' in the 2007 IUCN Red List. Recent population estimates are scarce or not available, due to the lack of survey information from most breeding areas. Colonies in the North hosting up to 700 birds in the 1980s now only contain a few dozen, reflecting the general population decline. At present the population is roughly estimated at 2,000 - 6,000 birds.

Continued habitat loss due to drainage and habitat conversion into rice fields are the main reasons for the decline, but hunting and egg collection have also been noted. The species has not adjusted to rice growing as well as has the Squacco Heron.

In 2007 the decline led to some local extinctions and reached a point where urgent conservation measures are required. AEMA initiated the preparation of an international action plan in 2008 to address and coordinate necessary conservation activities. Apart from securing the remaining breeding colonies, this involves a better survey of the existing colonies and understanding of the current population status and dynamics. The presence of trees near the colonies has been identified as crucial and should be a prime conservation target.

Conservation measures should not only target the remaining breeding colonies in Madagascar and Aldabra, but should also include the fresh water marshes in the species range states where the species is known to occur.



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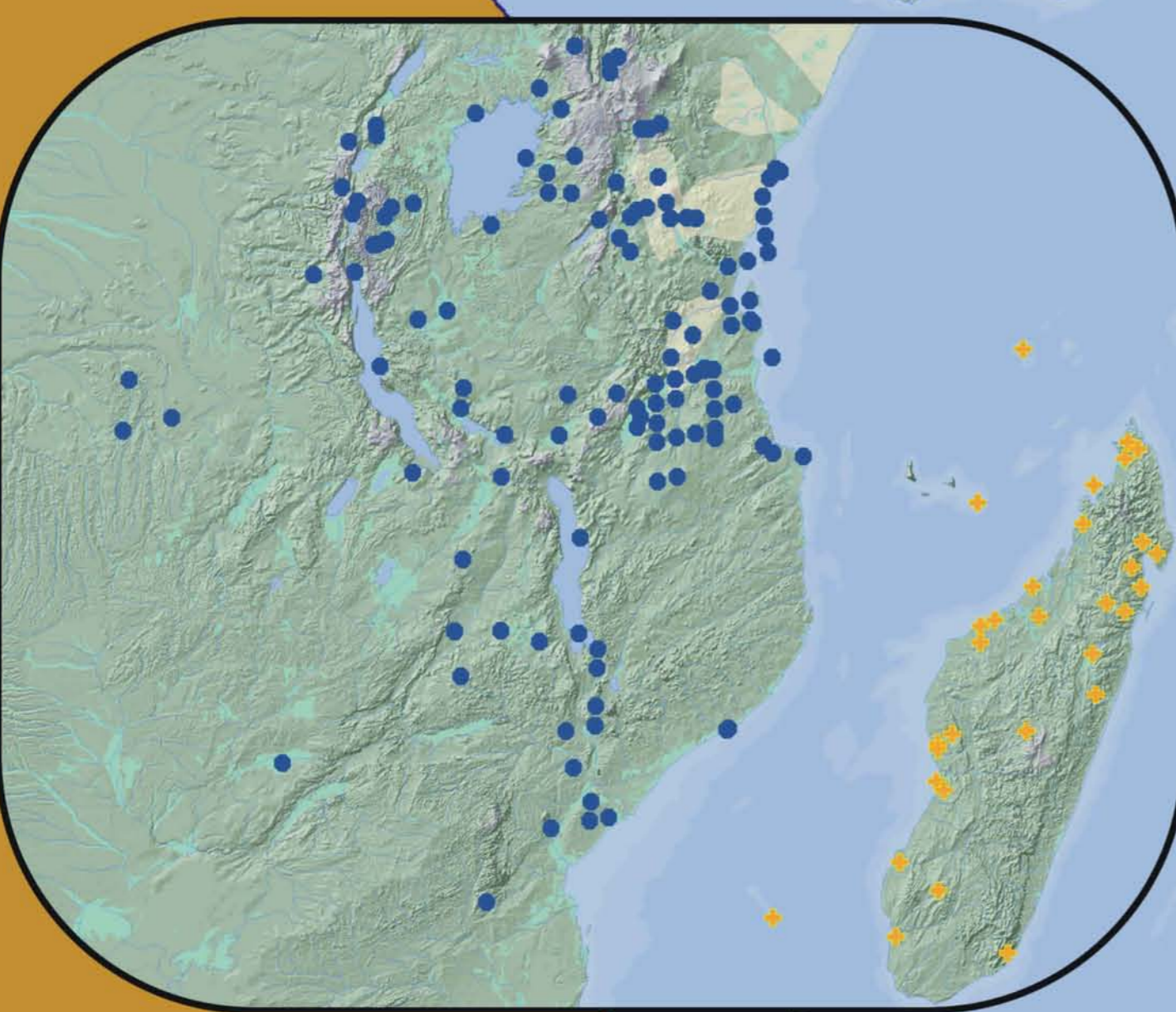
## Habitat

The breeding habitat comprises small grassy marshes, small lakes, ponds and streams from sea level to 1,800 m. See for example the floodplains of the Betsiboka River (North-West Madagascar) in the picture below. Breeding habitats also include rice fields near trees and bushes. It appears to be more dependent on trees than other heron species.

In the non-breeding areas in East and Southern Africa it occurs in fresh water marshes, sluggish rivers with fringing vegetation, and along small streams.



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## Distribution and migration

As its name indicates, the species is confined to the Malagasy region, breeding almost entirely in Madagascar and on the islands of Aldabra (Seychelles), Europa (Mozambique Channel, to France) and Mayotte (Comorian archipelago, to France). Today the breeding range is very patchy and mainly covers small areas in the North and West of Madagascar, whilst most southern areas have been deserted.

From late May to October the heron migrates to the East and Southern Africa, mainly to Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. There are also regular records from the Seychelles, the Comoros, and a few records from Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zimbabwe.

With the start of the rainy season, from late October to December, the Madagascar Pond Heron returns to its breeding areas, where it breeds in small colonies (often joining large colonies of other species, such as the Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*).



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**LEGEND**

Wintering Range	Breeding Range	Mountains
Breeding Range	Flyway	Deserts
Flyway		Water bodies
		Wetlands
		Glaciers

Projection: Lambert azimuthal  
Latitude of centre of projection: 30 00 00