

Long-Term Tracking of Max the Stork

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In July 1999, for the first time in Switzerland, an animal was fitted with an Argos PTT. It was a young White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), "Max", born in May 1999 at Avenches in Western Switzerland. On 5 July 1999, a Microwave Telemetry solar 35 gram PTT was attached as a backpack to Max. It was decided that her journeys should be documented and mapped for everybody to follow on the Internet.



Max being fitted with a 35g Solar PTT.

Photo by Adrian Aebischer

Max fledged on 12 July, but she stayed with her parents for a few weeks. On 12 August she started her first migration south. She passed through France and Spain, then crossed the Strait of Gibraltar to Morocco and tried to cross the Sahara desert. However, during a heavy sand storm she reversed her direction and flew back to northern Morocco where she spent her first winter close to the town of Guercif. The following spring Max returned to Spain and stayed the whole summer at a rubbish-dump near Madrid. Spanish ornithologists once spotted the bird eating the remains of a fowl.

In August 2000 Max flew again to Morocco, tried to cross the Sahara but returned to northern Morocco to spend her second winter there. Next spring she flew to Central Europe and visited a village called Salem in southern Germany, but she did not breed. In late summer she again migrated to Morocco returning to Salem in summer 2002.

During her journeys Max's movements were followed daily by several thousand people: her migration was published on the Internet and maps were regularly updated. All newspapers and other media in Switzerland and even many newspapers elsewhere



Max on one of her first flights after fledging at 9 weeks old.

Photo by Adrian Aebischer

in Europe reported on this bird. A Swiss TV team was present when she was fitted with this PTT, and filmed Max for the first time. Since then, several TV



Photo by Adrian Aebischer

In 2004 Max reared three young.

channels have broadcast reports on Max, and several people were lucky enough to film her.

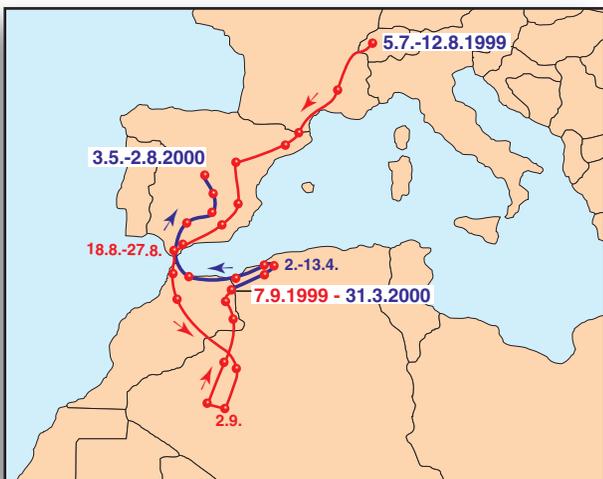
In 2002, when Max was breeding for the first time in a colony of White Storks at Salem, she chose the only nest of that colony that was surveyed by a video camera! Definitely, Max likes to be at the center of attention.

In subsequent years Max always returned to Morocco for the winter and came back to Salem to breed. Max leaves her winter quarters earlier each year: In 2000 and 2001, she started traveling on 1 April. In 2002 she left on 27 March and in 2003 on 7 February. Last year, her migration began on 31 January, and in 2005 she started her journey on 11 January.

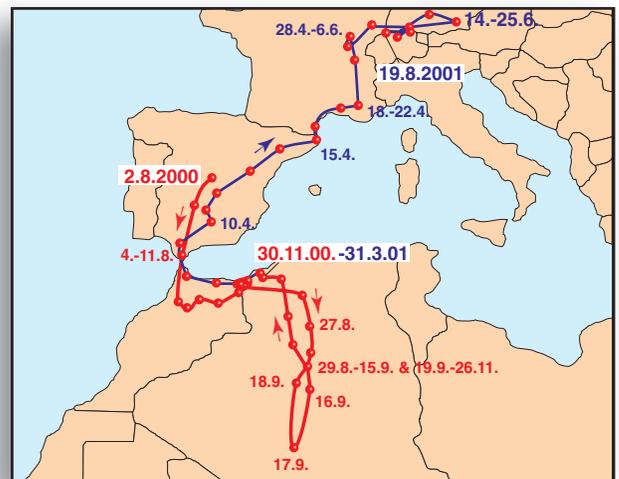
Max raises two or three young every year. She is surveyed by the responsible people at the White Stork colony at Salem in southern Germany. Once a year we visit her at her breeding place and take some pictures.

Many White Storks have been tracked through the Argos system, but Max is the first one that has been followed from the time she was a nestling up to the time she bred for the first time and beyond. All in all, she has been under close observation for over 6 years.

In September 2005 Max headed for the seventh time to her winter quarters in Morocco, 2200 km away from her breeding place. Even though the antenna of her PTT is now somewhat damaged, she is still regularly, almost daily, localized by the Argos system. From 5 July 1999 to 15 October 2005 Max was tracked on 2295 days and we are looking forward to even more results during the forthcoming months.



Max's first journey from Switzerland to Africa and back to Spain.



Max's second journey from Spain to her wintering ground in Morocco and back to Switzerland and southern Germany.