

FACT SHEET

AUSTRALIAN WHITE IBIS

The Australian White Ibis (Threskiornithidae: *Threskiornis moluccus*) is a large, distinctive white wading bird. One of three native ibis species, it is easily recognised by its large white body, long neck, black head and downward curving black bill. This amazing long decurved bill helps the bird to sense invertebrates in terrestrial and marshy environments. It is also very useful for picking through garbage, earning it the nicknames 'bin chicken' and 'tip turkey'.

AN INCREASINGLY URBAN SPECIES

Historically, their natural breeding and foraging grounds are wet and marshy areas or grasslands across eastern, northern and south-western Australia. However, long periods of drought along with changes to water management regimes in their inland habitat has forced flocks of these birds into urban areas. Here they discovered new opportunities for feeding and breeding.

This species of ibis is well-suited to the urban environment. Being able to consume a wide variety of organic matter is a trait which has helped the species adapt well. In addition, many species of palm trees in gardens and

parks provide an ideal breeding site for ibis, especially if they are close to water.

Australian White Ibis are now a common species in parks, waste processing centres, and ovals across Sydney. In fact, you can find these striking white birds in many parts of urban and suburban Australia.

As with all native species, ibis are protected by law. While not everyone may be fond of these large and stately birds, the fact that they are steadily leaving their native breeding grounds and infiltrating urban areas is a warning sign that something is out of kilter with our environment.

Photo credit: Dr Richard Major, Australian Museum



AND SUBURBAN

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WHY ARE THEY A PROBLEM?

As droughts and changes to river management continue to affect our inland wetlands, ibis are becoming reliant upon urban food sources provided by humans. Open rubbish bins, waste centres, open grassy ovals, garbage strewn across parks all provide ample food for these opportunistic birds.

1. Ibis are well-adapted to scavenge food and can cause significant mess when they dig through garbage bins.
2. They are mostly unfazed by humans and some will readily steal food from picnickers. Although not dangerous or aggressive, they can be intimidating due to their large size and long beak.
3. Faecal drop under roost trees and in feeding areas can be smelly and very messy. While scientific evidence is currently scarce, faecal drop may pose a potential health impact.
4. Nesting colonies can be very noisy and messy.
5. As with many bird species, ibis can pose a potential airstrike hazard when foraging near airfields.
6. Large numbers of ibis can cause damage to plants in roosting, breeding and feeding areas.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO ASSIST?

1. Ensure your garbage bins are always covered. Ibis thrive on access to food scraps.
2. If using a public park or open space, always put your rubbish in the bin or take it home and dispose of it appropriately.
3. Don't feed or encourage birds.
4. Consider removing exotic plant species from your garden that provide nesting sites, particularly Cocos Palms (*Syagrus romanzoffianum*). Cocos Palms are a listed Noxious Weed. They also attract flying-foxes and can cause them harm.
5. The Australian Museum, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney University and Domain Trust are currently conducting a long-term project to understand Sydney's Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and Australian White Ibis populations. If you see an ibis or cockatoo with a numbered plastic tag on its wing or metal / coloured plastic bands around its legs, report it to the WingTags project. By reporting the bird, you will be providing valuable data about ibis populations and behaviour. You can send your report via email to ibis.sightings@gmail.com or download the WingTags app (available for both Androids and iPhones).

Any further questions, please contact Council.

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