

## Australian White Ibis

Ibis are common residents of our urban centres.

### Scientific name

*Threskiornis moluccus*

### Did you know?

Ibis are a part of our natural landscape. The Australian White Ibis is native to Australia and is one of three ibis species in Australia alongside the Straw-necked Ibis and the Glossy Ibis.

For thousands of years ibis have been sacred to Indigenous communities and are excellent indicators of wetland health.

### Description

The Australian White Ibis is characterised by having predominantly white plumage with a featherless black head, neck, and legs. Its bill is also black, long and downcurved. Females are slightly smaller and have a shorter bill than males.

In flight, flocks of ibis often form a distinct V-shape to minimise energy costs.

### Diet

Ibis typically feed on invertebrates, including freshwater crayfish and crickets.

Due to declines in the quality of their natural habitat and their expanding population size (see Distribution), many ibis have unfortunately begun supplementing their diets from landfill sites, bins and litter in our cities and towns. This has led to them being given the common nicknames of “bin chickens” or “tip turkeys”.

### Habitat

Ibis typically reside in wetlands and can be highly nomadic. In other words, they can fly great distances to follow where there is greater availability of food. In fact, an ibis that was banded in Victoria was found in Papua New Guinea in the 1960s!



Figure 1: Australian White Ibis

Credit: Nick Talbot

Ibis can be found in all but the driest of habitats and have become very successful residents of parks and gardens in our urban centres.

### Distribution

Ibis are common and widespread across northern, eastern and south-western Australia. Historically large ibis populations occurred at large inland wetlands where they would migrate to the wetlands with the most food (normally the wetlands that were in flood). However, agricultural and water developments have led to droughts and declines in the quality of their natural habitat.

The species began to expand into new habitats including urban areas which have more predictable food and water sources. Given ibis now occupy a larger area with abundant food and water resources (i.e. from rubbish etc.) their population size has increased leading to greater potential for human-wildlife conflict to occur.

### Management

In Victoria ibis (along with all native wildlife) are protected under the *Wildlife Act 1975*. DELWP encourages all Victorians to live alongside wildlife and appreciate the resilience and ingenuity of birds like ibis who have adapted to live in urban environments that

# Our Wildlife Fact Sheet

are unsuitable for many other animals. Severe penalties apply for harming or destroying our protected wildlife.

However, DELWP does recognise that when ibis flock in large numbers in urban areas, some people may find them difficult to live with as they may be noisy and smelly.

## Mutual benefits

Well managed urban environments can create spaces where there is mutual benefits and enjoyment between ibis and humans, thereby promoting thriving environments and communities.

Ibis play an important role in aerating the soil while they probe for insects on our public parks and sporting ovals.

Large colonies of breeding ibis can inspire awe in passers-by, provide great educational opportunities for children to connect to nature, and encourage people to care for the environment.

## How you can help!

Ibis are a part of our natural landscape. Ways that people can get involved with our local wildlife include birdwatching, joining a local wildlife group and cleaning up rubbish in your local area.

To help us continue to learn about the role that ibis play in ecosystems and our urban areas you can report sighting of colour banded birds to the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme (ABBBS) via:

Email: [abbbs@environment.gov.au](mailto:abbbs@environment.gov.au)

Phone: (02) 6274 2407

Online:

<https://www.environment.gov.au/science/bird-and-bat-banding/get-involved/report-band-sightings>

## If you have trouble with ibis on your property

### To deter ibis roosting at your property

1. Do not harm or harass the birds.
2. Do not feed ibis or leave scraps of food or rubbish lying around; ensure all garbage lids are kept closed (particularly industrial waste bins).
3. Reduce waste disposal where possible and remove water sources and pet food from the backyard.
4. Reduce access to water, but if pool areas or water features are desired you could:
  - a. Use a pool cover.
  - b. Reduce areas for sitting/perching (e.g. avoid railings or design them so they're not attractive for perching e.g. flat top or adding bird spikes)
  - c. Install specific water filtration systems that aid in removing pollutants.
5. Avoid planting trees that the ibis find desirable for roosting including tall trees like exotic palms and Melaleuca.

### Authority to Control Wildlife (ATCW)

If you have tried the above methods and ibis are still causing damage to your property, posing a risk to human health or impacting biodiversity, you may apply for an ATCW to scare the birds and encourage them to roost elsewhere.

The application process can be found at <https://www.vic.gov.au/wildlife-management-and-control-authorisations>

### Further reading

Report any suspected illegal activity in regard to ibis to the DELWP Customer Contact Centre on 136 186.

You can find more information regarding protected wildlife on the DELWP website [www.wildlife.vic.gov.au](http://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au)

Morcombe, M., (2004), *Field guide to Australian birds*, Steve Parish Publishing, Australia.

Simpson, K. and Day, N., (2010), *Field guide to the birds of Australia*, (8th ed), Penguin Books, Australia.

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