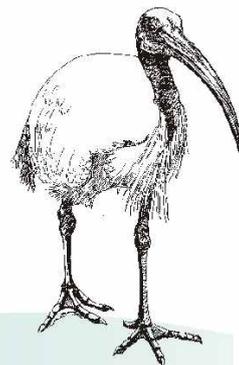


Junior Ranger Nature Notes

Junior Ranger

INTRIGUING IBISES

What bird is glossy, white and straw-necked? None really, but each describes the common name of Australia's three Ibis species. Ibises are strange looking waterbirds that are found all over Australia. They are getting a bit of a bad rap as scavengers and nuisances, but as you'll see, they are pretty amazing birds.



FOUND ALL OVER

Ibises like warm places. The Australian White and Straw-necked Ibises are common and widespread in northern and eastern Australia. The Glossy Ibis is most common in northern Australia. They occur in all but the driest habitats, but simply love marshy wetlands and tidal mud flats. Many also live in urban parks and gardens and supplement their diet by feeding on rubbish. In fact there are so many that these birds are now considered a nuisance in some communities.



WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

Ibises obtain their food in and around shallow water, catching small fish, frogs, crustaceans, insects, and other invertebrates. They also probe for insects, crabs, and worms in mud and soil. A particular favourite are mussels, which are opened by hammering them on a hard surface to reveal the soft body inside. Sometimes, they will feed on the eggs of reptiles or other birds. Feeding in the water is done mainly using their sensitive bills to 'feel' for food.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Recognise ibises yet? Check out these pictures to help you identify them.

Bald, black head and entire neck.

Long, black and down-curved bills

White body and wing feathers. Often stained dirty brown.

Spiny white feathers on adult chests.

Black-tipped inner feathers.

Australian White Ibis
Threskiornis molucca

Lays 2- 5 dull white eggs.

Dusky feathered neck with a naked blue-grey face.

Bill olive-brown.

Red-brown body feathers with metallic shiny green on the wings.

Glossy Ibis
Plegadis falcinellus

Lays up to 6 green-blue eggs.

Long, black and down-curved bills.

Bald, black head and top of throat.

Back and wings black with shiny green.

Stiff, yellow straw-like feathers on lower neck.

Belly feathers white.

Straw-necked Ibis
Threskiornis spinicollis

Lays up to 5 dull white eggs.

IBISES IN-FLIGHT

Ibises extend their necks forward when flying. Their wing beats alternate with periods of gliding and when flying in flocks they alternate from one form of flight to the other at about the same time. It looks like synchronised flying! Look for flocks forming distinctive V-shaped patterns.

CARING AND SHARING PARENTS

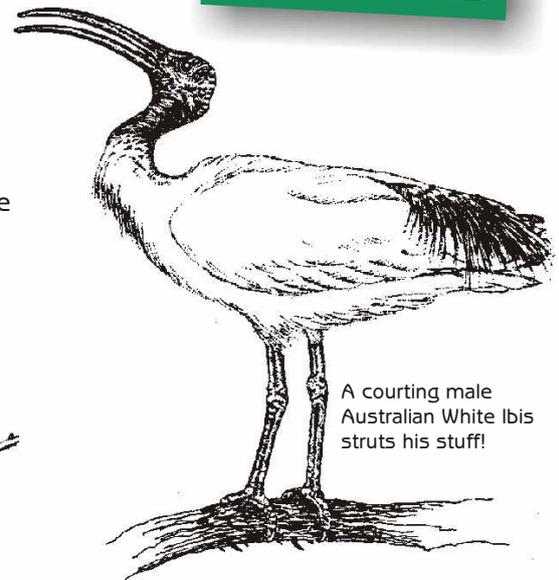
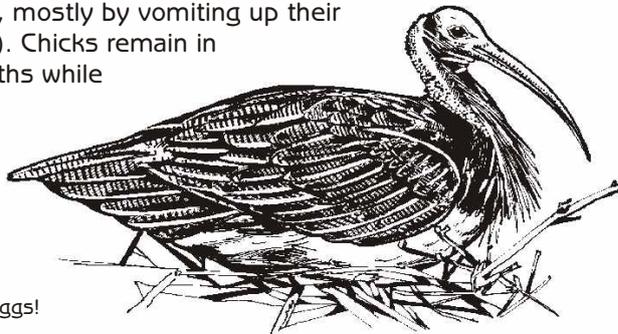
Ibises build their nests on low plants like rushes and shrubs, often alongside other waterbirds. They are a simple platform of reeds, rushes and sticks, usually on top of water. Their colonies may be huge, numbering many thousands.

During **courtship** (like dating) males first choose a good place to advertise themselves to females, such as a branch in a tree. Here they really show off, pointing their bills in the air, bowing, and making other strange movements. They make noisy popping sounds by snapping their bills open and shut, and will sometimes pick up a twig and shake it. They are really aggressive towards other males.

When a female lands nearby, the male may give her the cold shoulder, but if he accepts her, they join together in a display of preening and bowing. After mating, the male gathers sticks and branches which he gives to the female to build their nest.

Mum lays her clutch of eggs and both will take turns sitting on them (called 'incubation') for about a month. She may have up to three clutches a year. The chicks are born naked and helpless so both parents care for and feed their noisy babies, mostly by vomiting up their catch (called 'regurgitation'). Chicks remain in the nest for up to two months while they learn to fly. They are then on their own and won't breed themselves till they are about two years old.

A mother sits patiently on her eggs!



A courting male Australian White Ibis struts his stuff!

DID YOU KNOW?
Ibises are sometimes known as the 'Farmers friend'. They are welcomed onto farming properties because they eat crickets, locusts and other insects which are all considered pests to crops.

ANCIENT EGYPT AND IBISES!!

Ancient Egyptians worshipped a god who looked like an Ibis. He was known as the god of the moon, magic and writing and like all gods he had many names. Find his most common name by using the grid to decode the clues.

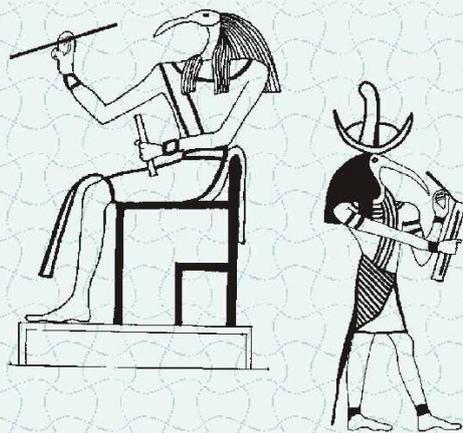
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5 ■ 3 ▲ 5 ★ 5 ■ 3 ▲

This is one way that this god's name was written,



Can you spot the ibis? Use the grid to decode what Scientists call this written picture language.



Usually, this god looks human with the head of an ibis but sometimes he looks like a complete Ibis. These are a couple of pictures. They are symbolic, for the Egyptians did not really believe that these gods actually looked like humans with animal heads.

3 ▲ 4 ▲ 5 ● 3 ■ 5 ★ 2 ▲ 2 ★ 5 ◆ 1 ■ 3 ▲ 4 ■

Want to learn more about Ibises?

Check out the affordable field guides *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* by either *Simpson & Day* or the one by *Pizzey & Knight*. Another good book is the *Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds*.