Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions
GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

FAUNA NOTES

Ibis – Issues in Urban Environments

Identification and Distribution

The Australian white ibis *Threskiornis molucca* is a large, wading waterbird. It is white on its body and wings, with black tips on the wing and tail feathers. The white feathers are often stained a dirty-brown colour. In flight, a bare scarlet patch of skin under the wings is visible, and the wingspan can reach up to 1.25m. The head is black and unfeathered, and it has a long, downward curving bill. They make a low, harsh croaking noise.

There are two other species of ibis in Australia, the glossy ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* and the straw-necked ibis *Threskiornis spinicollis*, but the Australian white ibis most commonly interacts with humans in agricultural, urban and suburban areas.

Refer to www.naturemap.dpaw.wa.gov.au to find further information on the species distribution.

Photos: Frank O'Connor/BirdLife WA

Behaviour

Ibis live in large colonies in wetlands and other water-based habitats across much of Australia. Ibis play an important role in natural pest management as it preys on small insects and grubs, often flocking together in areas affected by plagues of locusts and other insects. Their diet consists of a variety of terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates, small fish, amphibians, reptiles and human refuse in urban environments. In urban areas ibis scavenge for food and often congregate around landfill sites, city parks and recreational areas. Grassed areas are attractive to ibis, particularly during and after mowing.

They create nests from sticks and reeds in trees, shrubs, trampled wetland vegetation or on the ground. They normally lay 2-4 eggs between August and October and migrate large distances depending on the availability of food and water. However, many ibis have made urban environments like Perth a permanent home due to the abundance of water and food year round, which enables them to continuously breed throughout the year.

Environmental Law

All fauna native to Australia are afforded protection under both State and Commonwealth legislation.

Depending on the type of fauna-related activity, a licence issued by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions may be required. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure, trade, keep or move them unless authorised by a permit. To obtain a licence, the applicant needs to demonstrate that all reasonable non-lethal methods have been attempted and environmental impacts have been assessed. Further information is available on the Department's website.

Ibis-Human Interactions

Ibis have adapted well to urban, suburban and rural environments and population numbers have been growing in recent years. In larger colonies, urban ibis populations have been known to destroy habitat, reduce biodiversity, risk air traffic safety and cause a nuisance from noise and fouling public spaces.

If you find a sick or injured ibis contact the Wildcare Helpline on (08) 9474 9055 for information on registered wildlife rehabilitators and centres who can assist with your enquiry.

Disease Risk

Similar to other wildlife, ibis can carry bacteria and viruses and some studies have found that ibis are carriers of Avian influenza, Salmonella and Giardia, particularly if they have been feeding on refuse. There have been no documented cases of ibis to human infections but any contact should be avoided to reduce any risk of infection.

Damage Prevention and Control

Shooting is not permitted and scaring techniques and relocation are not effective. Culling and other population control methods are generally considered ineffective and inhumane, and will only be undertaken by suitably qualified and licenced personnel in extreme cases as part of a broader and long-term management program. The most effective and efficient strategy for managing ibis-human interactions is to prevent their access to water and food in urban environments.

Preventing ibis from accessing water and artificial food sources at landfill sites, sewage treatment ponds, airports, recreational areas and gardens can significantly reduce their use of an area. Netting, like the kind used for fruit crops, is an effective method for excluding ibis, but it should be installed correctly and maintained frequently to ensure that ibis are not harmed if they get caught in the netting. Reducing waste disposal where possible through recycling, making sure rubbish bins have lids and removing exotic plant species that ibis tend to nest in, such as the Cocos Palm and Bougainvillea, will also make urban environments less attractive to ibis.

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