

Large heron-like waterbirds with flat spoon-shaped bill (spoonbills) or strongly downcurved bill (ibises). Sexes alike. They fly with neck outstretched, rapid wingbeats alternating with long glides. Roost in trees; breed in colonies with platform nests made from twigs and tidal debris. Disperse widely after breeding. Silent away from colonies. Diet is fish, crustaceans and other aquatic invertebrates.

**GLOSSY IBIS** *Plegadis falcinellus*

Uncommon Australian vagrant

60 cm, 500 g. Slender glossy dark brown ibis with long downcurved bill. At a distance, stance like a feeding Pukeko. In breeding plumage, head, neck and upperparts deep glossy reddish brown, wings iridescent green; bill and facial skin grey, bordered at the base with a conspicuous white line. Non-breeding and juvenile dull brown with variable white mottling on head and neck. Flies with head and neck outstretched like a shag, but alternates rapid wingbeats with short glides. Feeds mainly by probing in soft mud. **Habitat:** Margins of freshwater lakes and swamps, and damp pasture. Occasional irruptions into NZ. [Sp 116]



**IBISES and SPOONBILLS** Threskiornithidae

30 species; 1 breeds in New Zealand and 3 are vagrants from Australia.

The bills of this group are highly distinctive: long and down-curved in ibises, long and spatulate in spoonbills. All are gregarious; breeding, roosting, and feeding in flocks. They feed mostly in shallow freshwater lakes,

brackish coastal lagoons and estuaries, but the ibises that visit New Zealand feed also in dry habitats in Australia, e.g. pasture and public parks. The mid-toe is specialised as a comb-claw in ibises; not in spoonbills. Most develop ornamental plumes when breeding. They disperse widely after breeding and are silent away from the breeding colonies.

**116. GLOSSY IBIS** *Plegadis falcinellus*

Plate 28

**Size:** 60 cm, 500 g  
**Distribution:** Breed widely in eastern North America, Europe, parts of Africa, central Asia,

India, Malaysia, Indonesia, New Guinea and Australia. They are frequent vagrants to New Zealand, sometimes irrupting in small flocks,

as in 1953, 1968, 1975 and 1988. One record from Chatham Island (December 1984). In New Zealand, they frequent damp pasture and rough pasture and rushes on the muddy margins of freshwater lakes.

**Behaviour:** Gregarious all year. They are easily overlooked, resembling the hunched posture of a feeding Pukeko, and in flight they can be confused with a shag. They are usually extremely wary.

**Feeding:** Peck and probe rapidly for food in soft ground, taking food in the tip of the curved bill. In Australia, they take all sorts of aquatic invertebrates and pasture insects. In New Zealand, they have been known to take fish, small eels, frogs and tadpoles from swamps and insects and earthworms from pasture.

**Reading:** Lowe, K.W. 1983. *Emu* 83: 31-34. Sansom, O. et al. 1954. *Notornis* 6: 18-19.