

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.

AUSTRALIAN WHITE IBIS *Threskiornis molucca*

Rare Australian vagrant

70 cm, 2 kg. Large scruffy white ibis with long heavy downcurved bill and unfeathered black head. In breeding plumage, short yellowish plumes on foreneck, and long frilly black tertials droop over tail and folded wing. Non-breeding lacks neck plumes, and tertials shorter and greyer. Juvenile has head and neck fully feathered dark grey and white. In flight, neck outstretched, wings tipped black, and in adults a line of red bare skin shows on the underwing. Walks slowly, probing in mud. **Habitat:** Freshwater or brackish wetlands and wet pasture. [Sp 117]



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.

117. AUSTRALIAN WHITE IBIS *Threskiornis molucca* Plate 28

Size: 70 cm, 2 kg

Geographical variation: Of the three subspecies, *strictipennis* of Australia, southern New Guinea and part of the Solomon Islands reaches New Zealand.

Distribution: Breed in Australasia from the Moluccas to New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Australia. They were first recorded near Nelson, in 1925. There were minor irruptions in 1957 and 1975–76. Ten or more juveniles arrived in 1957 at scattered localities from

Northland to Southland, and were seen at various places during the following five years. A similar influx in 1975–76 was at first in Northland and the Bay of Plenty, but later elsewhere in the North Island. Most remained through 1976 but had gone by 1980. The only record since has been of one bird near Westport (January 1986).

Behaviour: Very like the Glossy Ibis in habitat and habits.