

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.

**YELLOW-BILLED SPOONBILL** *Platalea flavipes*

Rare Australian vagrant

88 cm, 1900 g. Like Royal Spoonbill, but plumage off-white and bill and legs pale yellow. Facial skin pale grey, bordered by a black line. In breeding plumage, medium-length stiff white plumes on lower neck, thin black lace-like plumes on wings, and red patches in front of eye. Feeds by sweeping partly open bill from side to side in shallow water. **Habitat:** Mainly inland wetlands and wet pasture. [Sp 119]



**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.

**119. YELLOW-BILLED SPOONBILL** *Platalea flavipes* Plate 28

**Size:** 88 cm, 1900 g  
**Distribution:** Breed only in Australia. Two New Zealand records: Rangaunu Harbour and Kaitaia area (1976–78) and Te Whiti, Wairarapa (December 1981).

**Behaviour:** In Australia, they prefer feeding in shallow dams and pools of fresh or brackish waters rather than tidal mudflats. They also feed on damp or flooded pasture.  
**Reading:** Billing, A.E. 1977. *Notornis* 24: 192.