

Sacred Ibis

Threskiornis aethiopicus



Class: *Aves*

Order: Ciconiiformes

Family: *Threskiornithidae*

Characteristics:

Sacred Ibis is characterized by the distinct greyish-black head and neck (which lacks feathers) and curved bill. The black-tipped wings have areas of red skin visible above and below and the sides of the bodies are often bare where the wings lay.

Behavior:

Sacred ibis are opportunistic predators which are a migratory species throughout Africa. They are gregarious (meaning social) birds that will use communal nesting sites. They often leave their nests at sunrise to travel in search of food. They are quiet birds that make only low guttural sounds.

Reproduction:

These birds will travel several hundreds of miles to breed during the rains ([Arkive](#)). They gather together in large, mixed colonies, often in the islets of rivers or in trees, of up to 2,000 breeding pairs. The pairs bond lasts for one breeding season. The male collects nesting materials and the females assemble the nest which is a large platform of sticks and branches lined with leaves and grass. They locate the nest in a tree, bush or on the ground if no taller vegetation is available. Females lay 2-5 eggs and both sexes incubate the eggs which hatch around 28 days.

Diet:

Wild: worms, mollusks, crustaceans, fish and insects

Zoo: feline diet, capelin, crane pellets, greens

Conservation:

While sacred ibis population seems to be declining, it doesn't appear to be sufficient to cause worry. On islands, for example on Aldabra, they appear to be declining due to hunting and human disturbance; on Madagascar their eggs are gathered by people for food.

FYI:

Ibis are in the same family as spoonbills. In ancient Egyptian culture, the sacred ibis were worshipped as the god Thoth who was the god of wisdom. It was supposed to protect the country from plagues and serpents. In folklore, ibis were thought to be the last bird to take shelter from a storm and the first to reappear after the storm. They were often mummified and buried with pharaohs, often 1,000 or more birds in a tomb.



Range & Habitat:

Found in freshwater wetlands, salt pans, dams, mangroves, rivers and cultivated fields of Africa.



Lifespan: up to 20 years in captivity, 5-10 years in the wild.

Special Adaptations: Their long, downcurved bill is used to probe soft mud and sand in search of prey.

IUCN Conservation Status:

Least Concern

