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## Profile

# White Ibis

*Eudocimus albus*

The White Ibis is a medium-sized wading bird. Adults are entirely white except for black wing tips. The face of the ibis is bare and pink, blending into its long, curved bill, which is pink with brown at the very tip. It has long pink legs, which end with webbed toes. The adults eyes are light blue.

When White Ibis are ready to breed, their pink face, bill, and legs turn a bright tomato red, the tip of the bill turns almost black, and they develop red swollen pouches on their throats, almost as if they had the mumps.

Immature ibis begin chocolate brown with white bellies and eventually molt to the all-white plumage, which takes about two years to complete.

White Ibis are tactile feeders, probing in mud and swamp bottoms with their long bills as they slowly walk along. They can also pick insects off of dry ground and are sometimes seen in yards probing.

As soon as something touches the bill, it snaps shut. Feeding by touch allows them to forage in murky and muddy water where waders that feed by sight are much less successful.

Often ibis feed in mixed flocks, usually with Great Egrets, which has advantages for both species. The egret, a visual hunter, will see food that the ibises startle into moving, and because the ibis have their heads down as they probe, they can be alerted to possible danger when the egret, whose head is almost always up, calls out or flies off.

White Ibis live in wetlands of the interior and in coastal marshes and swamps, but they may fly out up to 15 miles a day from the roosting colony in search of food. Nesting colonies are in marshes, mangroves, and along lake and stream edges.



The White Ibis walk slowly while foraging, occasionally leaping over others in the flock as it moves across its feeding grounds. They are highly sociable, nesting, feeding, roosting, and flying in flocks. In spite of this, ibises defend their small nesting territory. They do this by jabbing and biting at rivals, as well as holding their opponent's wing or head in their bill.

White Ibis nest in large mixed-species colonies. Males arrive at the breeding

grounds first, preening and pointing their bills towards the sky to attract a mate.

Pair formation in ibises tends to depend on the amount of rain, light, and available food rather than occurring at a set time in a year. Nest building, however, tends to fall between May and early June.

Colonies begin with the roost sites of males, who form a sort of daytime bachelor party. The females then come and both male and female build the nest nearby. The male brings sticks, reeds, leaves and other plant materials to the female who constructs a platform nest in the crotches of trees and other woody plants. Rarely do they nest on the ground.

On average, 2-3 eggs are laid, both the male and female incubate, and the eggs hatch about 21 days after incubation begins. The nestlings are born with their eyes closed and cannot stand, preferring to sleep for the first week of life. They are easily overheated, so both parents make sure to keep them guarded from the sun with their wings. Both parents feed the chicks regurgitated food, and around six weeks after hatching, the fledgling ibises first leave the colony. They do not leave permanently until they are at least four-fifths of the adult mass, which takes about two years to achieve.



A study of White Ibis feeding habits in South Florida, conducted in the early 1970's, found that 52% of the weight of food was crayfish. Fish made up 19% of the inland diet with the Sailfin Molly being the most common prey. Other food sources were dragonfly larvae, apple snails, water bugs, and some horsefly larvae. Newts and Pig Frogs were the only vertebrates commonly eaten, although they will take small snakes. In coastal habitats, Fiddler Crabs were the most common prey.