

Species Fact Sheets

Order: Ciconiiformes
Scientific Name: *Threskiornis aethiopicus*

Family: Threskiornithidae
Common Name: African sacred ibis

AZA Management: Green Yellow Red None

Photo (Male):



Photo (Female):



NATURAL HISTORY:

Geographic Range: Europe Asia North America Neotropical
 Africa Australia Other Escapes from zoos in Europe and the Middle East have created incidental populations there.

Habitat: Forest Desert Grassland Coastal
 Riverine Montane Other Have taken to human civilization well.

Circadian Cycle: Diurnal Crepuscular Nocturnal Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

Cold Tolerance: To 70° F To 60° F To 50° F To 40° F
 To 30° F To 20° F Other Offer shelter and heat below this temperature. Should not be outside below freezing.

Heat Tolerance: To 30° F To 50° F To 70° F To 90° F
 To 110° F Other Birds are very heat tolerant. Access to shade and misters recommended above 100.

Diet: Frugivore Carnivore Piscivore Insectivore
 Nectivore Omnivore Folivore Other (Add Below)

Captive Dietary Needs:

Capelin/herring, silversides, formulated ground meat diet (Nebraska B.O.P., Miliken Feline), dog chow, flamingo chow, hardboiled egg, mealworms/crickets; crayfish/goldfish for enrichment.

Life Expectancy in the Wild: Males: 20 years Females: 20 years

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Life Expectancy in Captivity: Males: 20 years Females: 20 years

BREEDING INFORMATION:

Age at Sexual Maturity: Males: 18 months Females: 18 months

Courtship Displays: Males establish nesting territory through a series of threat displays and even pursuit flights. If a female chooses a male then pair formation is cemented through bowing face to face, intertwining their necks, preening and vocalizations including squeaks, squeals and wheezing. Neck sacs may be enlarged. Antagonistic displays involve many of the same behaviors, but can be differentiated by open beaks, open wing displays, and supplanting attacks. (Urban, 1974)

Nest Site Description: Sacred ibis are communal nesters. Nests are highly variable, ranging from high trees among other Ciconiiformes, to bushes, to bare rocky surfaces near islets of rivers, and sometimes near human settlement. Their nests are formed out of sticks and are lined with softer leaves and grasses (del Hoyo, 1992).

Clutch Size, Egg Description: 2-4 eggs each clutch. Eggs are white and oblong.

Incubation Period: 28-29 days, synchronous hatch

Fledgling Period: 14-21 days old

Parental Care: Males and females pair-bond for the season and are not known to be promiscuous. They both contribute to chick feeding and care, nest protection and nest building. Parents regurgitate food to the chick multiple times in one feeding bout, the chick resting between parcels of food. Chicks vocalize and beg by stretching and moving its head and neck until it meets the parent's mouth. After about a week, parents don't tend to the nest as often. When chicks leave the nest at about two to three weeks, they are mostly unattended except for a few feedings a day. On average each pair can successfully raise one bird each clutch (Urban, 1974).

Chick Development: At hatching chicks are semi-altricial and have open eyes. They have mostly white downy feathers all over their body with black down on the head and neck. The bill and legs are pinkish-white. Their beak begins to curve around 40-50 days old. As they mature the black down is lost all down the neck until it is all black skin, which usually happens around 1 year old. They leave the nest around 14-21 days old, but aren't fully flighted until around 30-40 days old. (Urban, 1974)

CAPTIVE HABITAT INFORMATION:

Social Structure in the Wild: Can be found in foraging groups between 2 and 20 individuals, and occasionally as many as 300 during the day. Nesting colonies can number between 50 and 2000 pairs of birds (Brown, 1982).

Social Structure in Captivity: Similar to structure in the wild. Birds pair bond seasonally and there does tend to be dominant pairs in a colony that will obtain the better nest sites and will keep subordinate individuals from nesting and food.

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Minimum Group Size: 2

Maximum Group Size: As many as your exhibit will hold and not interfere with cage mates.

Compatible in Mixed Species Exhibits: Yes
Comments: Compatible with various waterfowl, softbills, gamebirds, other ciconiiformes, passerines, and pigeons. Have also been housed with hoofstock. Can actually be helpful in encouraging other ciconiiformes nesting and have not been known to take eggs from nests.

Optimal Habitat Size: 60 square feet per bird.

Management Challenges: They are hardy birds that breed readily and given that they are not sexually dimorphic and are colonial nesters that do not pair bond for life, it can be difficult to track parentage. Institutions need to keep up with banding, observing nesting, processing chicks and practicing dummy egg swapping to prevent undesirable offspring from being produced. They are not of conservation significance so making the argument to make space for them can be difficult. However, they're ideal for regional theming as they are good mixed species exhibit birds and can encourage other ciconiiformes to nest. It is important to note their morphological differences between Australian White Ibis and Black-headed Ibis which look remarkably similar and are also kept in North American Zoos. Differentiating features of the African Sacred Ibis from the other two are that they have black tips going down both secondary and primary feathers, they lack feathers from their heads down to the base of their necks and the bare skin on the underwing is truly red (del Hoyo, 1992).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

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REFERENCES:

del Hoyo, J.; Elliot, A.; Sargatal, J. (1992). Handbook of the birds of the world. (Volume. 1, Ostrich to Ducks, pp. 493). Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.

Brown, L.H., Urban, E.K., Newman, K. (1982). The birds of Africa (Volume 1, pp. 200-202). London: Academic Press.

Urban, Emil K. (1973) The Ibis. "Breeding of Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopica* at Lake Shala, Ethiopia." (Volume 116, issue 3 pp. 263-277). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

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