

Sacred Ibis

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Threskiornis aethiopicus*

Native to: Sub-Saharan Africa

Habitat: Wide range of mainly inland habitats by lakes and rivers

A distinctive species with a long, down-curved bill, white body and black head and neck.

Sacred ibis is not present in the wild in Northern Ireland. It was first brought into France and Italy as a zoological specimen in the 19th century but has since escaped into the wild. It is currently present in 8 EU countries. The species has yet to be recorded breeding in the wild in the UK or Ireland.

Sacred ibises are highly mobile and adaptable. They feed in a variety of man-made habitats including rubbish tips, farmyards and ploughed fields but are mostly found in wetlands, often in large colonies. Through its feeding habits, it can out-compete and even predate on native water birds, thus causing severe biodiversity losses locally. Colonial-nesting species such as terns and seabirds are particularly vulnerable.

Under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 it is offence to intentionally keep; breed; transport to, from or within Northern Ireland, use or exchange Scared ibis; or to release it into the environment.



Key ID Features



Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

Identification throughout the year

Sacred ibis do not vary in colouration during the year.

Field Signs

- Call - Generally silent.
- Behaviour - In Europe often found in flocks on coastal estuaries, but individual birds can join flocks of other waterbird species e.g. Herons. Breeding season is March to May.
- Nest - Colonial breeder, the nest forming a platform made from sticks and any other available materials.
- Eggs - 2 - 4 in a clutch. Dull white with a faint blue tinge.
- Fledglings - Once the chicks have fledged they can form large crèches.

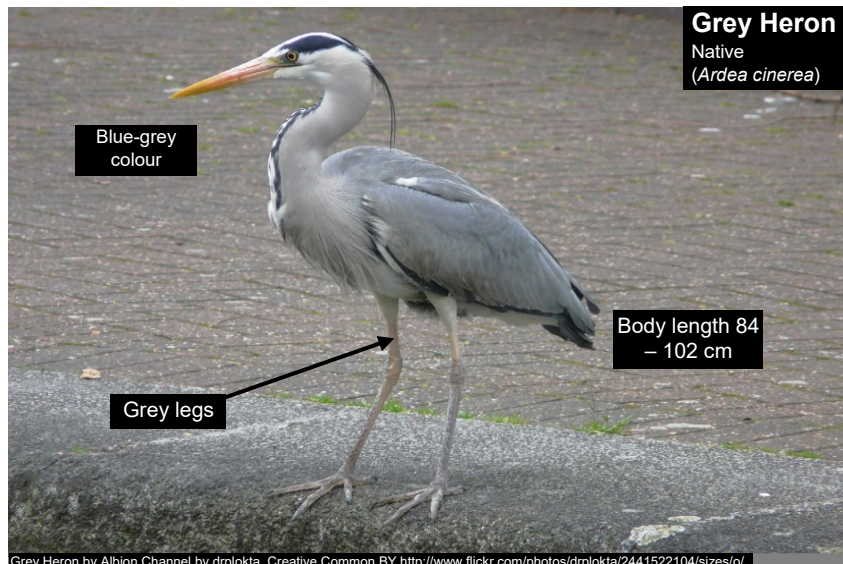
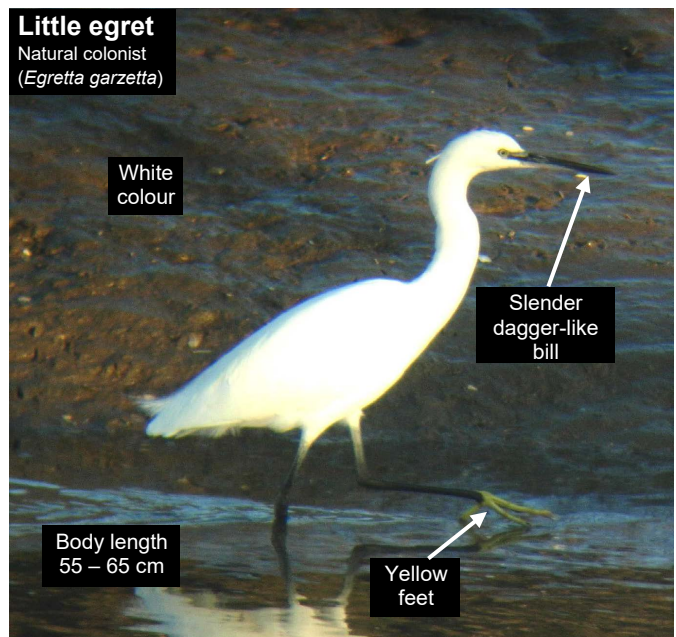
Distribution

A small number of feral or escaped sacred ibis have been recorded in Britain though there are no records of breeding pairs.

Similar Species

Sacred ibis, if clearly seen, are unlikely to be confused with any other species that regularly occurs in the UK. It should be noted that individual birds may well join multi-species flocks of waterfowl making their detection and identification difficult if only seen from a distance.

Herons, spoonbills and little egrets have a similar body-shape to sacred ibis.



References and further reading:

- Lever, C (2005) "Naturalised Birds of the World". T & A D Poyser
- Mullarney, K, Svensson, L, Zetterstrom, D and Grant, P J (2001) "Bird Guide". HarperCollins
- Snow, D W and Perrins, C M (1998) "The Birds of the Western Palearctic". Oxford University Press
- Yesou, P and Clergeau, P (2005) Sacred Ibis: a new invasive species in Europe. *Birding World* **18**, 517-526
- Photos from: drploкта, Mily Trabing, Rob Martin, Rus@Flickr.

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Adapted for Northern Ireland Environment Agency 2020