



SCARLET IBIS

CICONIIFORMES
Family: Threskiornithidae
Genus: *Eudocimus*
Species: *ruber*



Range: Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, Venezuela, Guiana, Brazil

Habitat: Coastal swamps, mangroves, lagoons, tidewater rivers

Niche: Diurnal, carnivorous, terrestrial/aquatic

Wild diet: Shrimp, crabs, various crustaceans, mollusks, and insects

Zoo diet:

Life Span: (Wild) 15 years

(Captivity) 20 years (oldest recorded 31 years)

Sexual dimorphism: males are generally larger than the females and have longer bills

Location in SF Zoo: South American Tropical Rainforest and Aviary

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

The Scarlet Ibis is a shorebird that is completely scarlet, except for the black wing tips. Their legs and feet are also pink in color. Their coloring is obtained from their diet that includes carotene-rich crustaceans and intensifies as the bird grows older. They have a long neck, long curved probing bill, and perching feet that are only slightly webbed. The long legs and toes help make the ibis just as comfortable walking as flying or perching in trees. A juvenile Scarlet Ibis is grey and white.

The long curved beak is used to probe for food in mud and shallow water, guided mostly by touch. They also are known to sway their bills back and forth in shallow water to capture prey. Sensitive feelers on the inside of their bill help the bird identify food before it even sees it. Their beaks are sensitive to movement and can detect prey through mud and water. The bird's nostrils are at the base of the bill, so the ibis can breathe while sticking its bill in the water or mud.

Weight: 23 oz

Length: 22–24 in

Wingspan: up to 38 in

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Not globally threatened. Scarlet Ibis are listed on CITES Appendix II, least concern on IUCN status, and are protected by the U. S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act. While not threatened at this time, they are hunted for their vivid feathers, meat and harvesting of eggs. Loss of foraging, nesting and feeding grounds and heavy pollution are also creating problems for this species. Trinidad has set aside a sanctuary called “Caroni Swamp” that includes 15 thousand acres of marshland, tidal lagoons and mangrove trees as a refuge for these birds.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Ibises are a rather quiet bird, only grunting or croaking on breeding grounds. Honking is heard when there is a disturbance in the nest or when the male is courting a female. Females make a squealing sound during courtship. The young make a shrill cry when hungry.

Most ibis species live in large flocks from hundreds to a few thousand. This dense social structure helps the birds keep watch for predatory big cats and birds. They even fly in flocks, either in a regular line or in a "V" formation grouping to decrease the wind resistance. They beat their wings in unison and even go from flapping to gliding at the same time. They fly with their necks extended.

Scarlet ibis live and forage for food with other types of wading birds like herons and egrets. Although they can live harmoniously with other species of birds, they also defend their individual space very aggressively. Scarlet Ibis fight with their beak, legs, and wings against enemies in order to protect themselves and their offspring.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Males are polygamous and use elaborate preening, head rubbing and flight displays to attract females, and breeding pairs will even wrap their necks around one another to cement their courtship. Both parents share nest-building duties, incubation, and help care for their young. Nesting sites may be found in tall trees, bushes, and even the side of high cliffs and most are found near the water. Platform nests consist of a loose pile of sticks and there may be more than one nest per tree. To feed their chicks adults grab hold of the bill of the young bird, which causes it to raise its head so that the parent can regurgitate into the mouth. The chick's feet develop quite fast; this allows the chicks to fledge as early as 2 weeks. Chicks fledge after 35 days they are able to fly well and are independent by 75 days and are able to leave the colony.

Incubation: 21 – 23 days	Sexual Maturity: 2 years
# of eggs: 1 - 3	Fledging: 35 – 42 days

MISCELLANEOUS

"Ibis" is derived from the Greek meaning "religious worship, sacred bird" and in ancient Egypt, the sacred ibis was held in high reverence: mummified and buried in temples with the Pharaohs. Fossil records of ibis go back 60 million years to the Eocene period.

The Scarlet Ibis is the national bird of Trinidad and is featured on the Trinidad and Tobago coat of arms.

This species is very closely related to the American White Ibis and is sometimes considered conspecific with it.

Sources:

Handbook of Birds of the World, Vol 1 © 1992 Lynx Edicions, p 501

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