

Where are all the ibis?

The Australian white ibis is a protected native species that plays an important role in their natural wetland habitat. However artificial population growth in urban areas, thought to be assisted by access to food at some waste landfills, has caused ibis to be perceived as a 'pest'.

A nationwide count of Australian white ibis in October 2011 is being organised by the Ibis Management Coordination Group (IMCG) and NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The IMCG was formed in Southeast Queensland to find non-destructive and ethical ways to manage overabundant ibis populations which started causing problems in our coastal towns and cities. The group consists of state environment departments, local councils, private organisations, airline corporations, airports and conservation groups.

The 2011 survey will be the second consecutive large-scale annual census. Advisor to the IMCG, Ecosure Managing Director, Phil Shaw said:

"It's really important that we know what the Australian white ibis population is up to. Through drought and poor water management along the Murray-Darling, the ibis have migrated from their traditional wetland breeding areas in the 1980's to cities and towns where they have become a problem. Ibis can damage vegetation, foul waterways, reduce biodiversity, carry disease and fly into aeroplanes causing damage."

Groups like the IMCG started managing ibis populations by disrupting their breeding cycle through egg and nest removal and restricting access to artificial food supplies at landfills and public areas, that are normally beyond their naturally selected diet

"As a native Australian bird we have to be careful that we are not placing the ibis population at risk by over-managing them." Said Mr Shaw. "Ibis get some pretty bad press, but they have their place. We are hoping that an aerial survey across inland areas by NSW University's Professor Richard Kingsford will show us that ibis are returning to their traditional wetlands since the rains have returned."

This survey will be the 28th consecutive year that Professor Kingsford has flown large tracts of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria to count waterbirds, including ibis.

There will still be ibis breeding in our towns and cities, therefore a count on Sunday 30 October will confirm where they are and how many.

"We are encouraging the community to get involved and if they see ibis report them." Said Mr Shaw.

For more information go to www.ecosure.com.au.