

## To the end of the world and back: Fifth International Penguin Conference, Ushuaia, Argentina

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On 12 September 2004, an unusual biological migration was observed, a phenomenon that only occurs once every four years. This was the fifth migration of such magnitude ever witnessed, as penguin biologists from many different countries from all the continents of the world migrated to Ushuaia, Argentina, and congregated for the Fifth International Penguin Conference.

Surrounded by snow-capped mountains, Ushuaia (see map) is situated on the island of Tierra del Fuego, at the southern tip of Argentina. It is located in a sheltered bay on the Beagle Channel and is the port of departure for passenger liners cruising to Antarctica. As the southern-most city in the world, it is also fondly referred to by locals, and marketed to wealthy cruise liner tourists, as the 'town at the end of the world'.

This migration to the end of the world included a party of ten South African scientists, conservationists and students, including representatives from the Avian Demography Unit, University of Port Elizabeth, Marine and Coastal Management, CapeNature, Rob-

ben Island Museum, SANCCOB, and Bird-Life SA.

The conference included oral sessions on feeding ecology, behaviour, breeding ecology, population dynamics and genetics, physiology, captivity and health, flipper banding, human disturbance, oil pollution, conservation – including presentations on large scale and international initiatives – as well as a sociable poster session where advice and ideas were shared and discussed.

The presentations were varied and interesting, with lots of positive stories. However, the negative effects of global warming on breeding penguins were clearly apparent in many talks and posters. These included issues of decreased productivity (and thus decreased food availability to sustain adult fitness and provision chicks); increased heat stress due to higher temperatures causing nest failure by abandonment; physical barriers formed by ice shelves that have broken away cutting off breeding areas from foraging areas; and adult mortality due to the physical impact of drifting ice crashing into breeding areas and crushing incubating penguins.

The flipper banding issue was still as contentious as ever, but the general consensus was that alternatives should be investigated that would alleviate or at least minimize the detrimental effects of banding. It was suggested that flipper banding should only be conducted for purposeful studies and not for 'ring and fling' mark-recapture studies, and where large cohort-type marking was necessary (e.g., fledglings marked in a season or rehabilitated birds following an oil spill) then perhaps colour marking (e.g., foot web-tags, tattooing, dye marking) could be used. Peter Barham of the University of Bristol, and an associate of the ADU, who has developed a new plastic flipper band currently being



tested on African Penguins on Robben Island, gave an interesting and thought-provoking presentation on using individual chest markings of certain species of penguins for identification, with the aid of digital photography and computer technology. Although this would not be suitable for all penguin species and for all research applications, with some refinement this work could have great potential at weighbridges and points of mass entry and exit at a colony.

The urgency of the situation for penguins and the need to take advantage of the presence of so many penguin biologists in one place, led to a two-day workshop following the conference to prioritise threats for each species, and to suggest future research and conservation priorities for all penguin species. The aim of this collaborative workshop, hosted by British Antarctic Survey, the University of Washington, Conservation International, Birdlife International, Conservation Breeding Specialist Group of IUCN/SSC, and sponsored by Sea World and the New England Aquarium, was to (a) review the 2004 Red List fact sheets for penguins; (b) review and update the 1998 Conservation

Assessment and Management Plan document for all penguin species; and (c) chart a future path for penguin conservation initiatives. From the feedback, it was evident that the top conservation issue for all species was threats to food availability by over-fishing and climate change. Thus, the top conservation priority involves fisheries management as well as the introduction of marine protected areas in penguin foraging areas.

Although the only penguin sightings were the backs of two miserable Gentoo Penguins huddled in a blizzard, and the rear end of one Magellanic Penguin as it dived underwater to escape the excited horde of curious biologists eager to get a glimpse of their first South American *Spheniscus* penguin, all in all it was a productive meeting, in a truly magical setting.

And now I can honestly declare that penguin biologists will indeed go to the end of the world and back for the sake of their beloved penguins!

#### Acknowledgements

Earthwatch and the Darwin Initiative supported my attendance of the conference.

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## Forktailed Drongo gleaning on Eland

**Craig Symes & Greg Davies**

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Roche & Kilpin (2003) reported a new record of gleaning by the Yellowspotted Nicator *Nicator gularis*. In addition, they reviewed other cases of gleaning by birds on large mammals, in particular those not reported to regularly do so.

On 8 August 2003, while conducting fieldwork in the Giants Castle Nature Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal, we observed a herd of six Eland *Taurotragus oryx* feeding in grassland on the edge of a *Leucosidea sericea* thicket. At 11:25, a single Forktailed Drongo

*Dicrurus adsimilis* was observed hawking over and behind the slow-moving herd. On one occasion, the drongo landed on an Eland's tail and appeared to glean and feed. The eland appeared to attempt to wag its tail but the drongo remained attached. Unfortunately, the Eland herd moved off and we were unable to observe for a longer period.

**Roche C. & Kilpin A. 2003.** New record of gleaning by the Yellowspotted Nicator. *Bird Numbers* 12(1): 18–19.

## Breeding data on the Water Thicknee in the Mpenjati Nature Reserve

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Breeding data for the Water Thicknee *Burhinus vermiculatus* currently consists of descriptions of the nest, nesting site, clutch size, and data on the eggs, with some data on the incubation period, but no information on fledging. On the KwaZulu-Natal south coast, this species breeds from August to February.

To gather accurate data on incubation and fledging, observations were made over three breeding seasons from August 2001 to April 2004, in the Mpenjati Nature Reserve (30°56'S, 30°18'E; 66 ha). The reserve is controlled by the Kwa-Zulu Nature Conser-

vation Service and is situated 20 km south of Margate. It is a small coastal reserve, with the main feature being the Impenjati River estuary. It is one of the very few remaining undeveloped estuaries on the KwaZulu-Natal south coast.

The reserve includes grassland, forest, wetland, dune and estuarine habitats. Grassland and forest are dominant. The forest is divided into coastal and dune forest. The coastal grasslands are intersected by numerous wetlands. Management actions include the control of alien invasive vegetation and two-yearly burning of the grasslands. Bird-life in the reserve is abundant, with over 250 species recorded. The Water Thicknee population at Mpenjati is healthy, with up to 34 birds counted in a single night.

At this site, Water Thicknees bred more than once in a season; several pairs successfully raised two clutches. All the nests were located by observing adult behavior, and were found during nest preparation and egg-laying phases. The locations of all nests were recorded using a GPS, and marked with small coloured pegs which were placed 1 m from the nest. The presence of the pegs had no effect on nesting activity and were easily accepted.

Incubation commenced within a day of laying of the last egg. The fledging period was taken from the day of hatching to the first flight. All nests were monitored until hatching occurred. As soon as each chick hatched, the adults flew off with the eggshells. As the chicks are precocial, they leave the nest as soon as they are able after hatching, normally within 24 hours. The young chicks are mobile, but they are not capable of catching and handling prey. The parents feed them up to about a week before fledging. The chicks evade predators by hiding and crouch-

**Table 1.** Fledging data for the Water Thicknee at Mpenjati Nature Reserve over three breeding seasons: August 2001 to April 2004.

Nest no.	Hatch date	Fledging date	Days to fledging
01/2001	27/01/01	29/03/01	62
02/2001	06/02/01	07/04/01	60
01/2002	30/01/02	30/03/02	60
02/2002	01/02/02	02/04/02	61
03/2002	08/02/02	08/04/02	60
04/2002	16/02/02	17/04/02	61
05/2002	03/11/02	02/01/03	61
06/2002	11/11/02	11/01/03	62
07/2002	18/11/02	19/01/03	63
01/2003	28/08/03	27/10/03	61
02/2003	07/09/03	07/11/03	62
03/2003	19/09/03	17/11/03	60
04/2003	27/10/03	25/12/03	60
05/2003	05/11/03	04/01/04	61
06/2003	26/11/03	27/01/04	63
07/2003	12/12/03	10/02/04	61
08/2003	09/01/04	09/03/04	61
09/2003	27/01/04	27/03/04	60
10/2003	04/02/04	03/04/04	61
<b>Mean</b>			<b>61.1</b>

ing motionless in grass or undergrowth on the edge of thickets or coastal forest, depending wholly on camouflage.

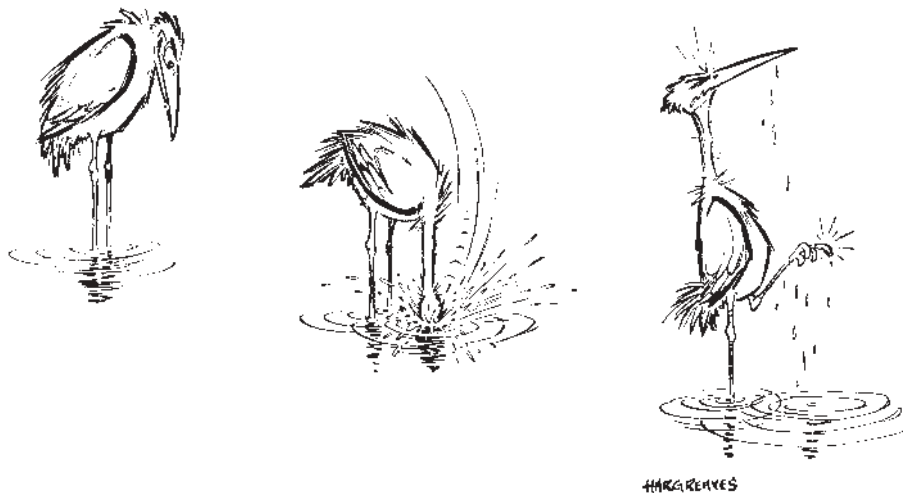
During the three breeding seasons, 27 nests were located and observed. Of these, 19 were successful breeding attempts. The others were failures due to nests destroyed by humans and eggs eaten by Water Monitors *Varanus niloticus*. In one instance, a nest was flooded by a rise in water level in the estuary. (The estuary filled with rainwater from inland and did not breach.)

All nests were small, shallow depressions in the ground, measuring 135–155 mm in diameter, and 15–20 mm in depth. The rims of the nests were lined with small pebbles and bits of plant matter. The nests were constructed by both adults. During incubation, it was noted that, when one of the adults approached the nest, it would stand motionless for a long period after its mate had got off the nest. It would occasionally preen itself and bob its head several times. On its final approach, it squatted down momentarily in

the incubating posture about one metre from the nest, bend down as if examining the eggs, and then proceed to incubate at the nest.

On hot days, incubating birds were observed sitting on the nest with beak open and wings slightly spread. The mate was more often than not observed standing in the shade some distance from the nest. It was interesting to note that both adults incubated the eggs during daylight hours; however the female always sat on the nest from last light until first light.

At Mpenjati, this species had a high breeding success rate. When a breeding attempt failed early in the season, the adults soon set about constructing another nest, normally in the vicinity of the first. The observed fledging period was 61.1 days (range = 60–63; n = 19 broods; Table 1). After fledging, the young birds normally congregated upstream in a group, well out of the way of the breeding adults, if there was a second breeding attempt.



## Publications by members of the ADU July–December 2004

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### Chapter in book

**Williams A.J. 2004.** Report from the *Treasure* workshop. In: Proceedings of the penguin workshop following the sinking of the *Treasure* in June 2000. Kuyper S. & Williams A.J. (eds). Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town. pp. 43–54.

### Research papers

**Summers R.W., Underhill L.G., Nicoll M., Strann K.-B. & Nilsen S.O. 2004.** Timing and duration of moult in three populations of Purple Sandpipers *Calidris maritima* with different moult/migration patterns. *Ibis* 146: 394–403.

**Williams A.J., Ward V.L. & Underhill L.G. 2004.** Waders respond quickly and positively to the banning of off-road vehicles from beaches in South Africa. *Wader Study Bulletin* 104: 79–81.

### Conference presentations, posters and abstracts

● **Second European Conference on Behavioural Biology (ECBB). 28–31 August 2004, Groningen, the Netherlands.**

**Calf K.M., Underhill L.G. & Visser G.H. 2004.** Does parental behaviour and timing of breeding season impact on chick growth and energetics? [poster].

**Calf K.M., de Leeuw J., Schekkerman H., Tulp I., Underhill L.G. & Visser G.H. 2004.** From hatching to fledging – an energetic perspective of Little Stint *Calidris minuta* chicks on the Taimyr Peninsula, Siberia. [poster].

**Mullers R.H.E., Navarro R.A., Underhill L.G. & Visser G.H.** How important is the timing of breeding in Cape Gannets? [presentation].

● **Third International Albatross and Petrel Conference. 23–27 August 2004, Montevideo, Uruguay.**  
**Olmos A. & Stagi A. (comp.). Abstracts.**

**Cooper J. & Rivera K.S.** FAO IPOA-Seabirds: progress to date and a comparative analysis of existing plans. p. 75. [presentation].

**De Bruyn P.J.N. & Cooper J.** Between a rock and a hard place: nest-site protection and breeding success of the Northern Giant Petrel. p. 21. [poster].

**De Villiers M.S., Cooper J. & Ryan P.G.** Variability of behavioural responses by Wandering Albatrosses (*Diomedea exulans*) to human disturbance. p. 21. [poster].

● **Fifth International Penguin Conference. 6–10 September 2004, Ushuaia, Argentina.**

**Barham P.J., Barham B.J., Underhill L.G., Crawford R.J.M., Leshoro T.M., Oschadleus H.D., Wolfaardt A.C. & Williams A.J.** Impact of the *Treasure* oil spill on survival and breeding of African Penguins on Robben Island. [presentation].

**Barham P.J., Crawford R.J.M. & Underhill L.G.** Energy costs of steel flipper bands caused by feather wear. [poster].

**Barham P.J., Crawford R.J.M., Underhill L.G., Leshoro T.M., Meyer M.A., Wolfaardt A.C., Oschadleus H.D. & Williams A.J.** Resighting rates of African Penguins relocated or oiled following the *Treasure* oil spill in 2000. [poster].

**Barham P.J., Underhill L.G., Crawford R.J.M., Leshoro T.M. & Bolton D.** Differences in breeding success of African Penguins depending on types of flipper bands used. [presentation].

**De Villiers M.S. & Giese M.** Heart rate responses of incubating African Penguins to pedestrian approaches. Abstracts. p. 21.

**Giese M. & De Villiers M.S.** To flee or not to flee: African Penguins and people. Abstracts p. 57.

**Griffin J. & Underhill L.G.** Variability in nest temperature between different nest types and its implication on desertion for the African penguin (*Spheniscus demersus*).

**Kemper J., Roux J-P., Bartlett P.A., Chesselet Y.J. & Jones R.** Population size, recent trends and conservation status of the African Penguin (*Spheniscus demersus*) in Namibia. [poster].

- Kemper J., Roux J-P. & Underhill L.G. 2004.** Breeding in bins: do artificial burrows improve breeding success of African Penguins (*Spheniscus demersus*) on Halifax Island, Namibia? [presentation].
- Whittington P.A.** Is hand raising orphaned African Penguin chicks worth the effort? An assessment from the *Apollo Sea* oil spill. [presentation].
- Wolfaardt A.C., Nel D., Underhill L.G., Williams A.J.** Breeding productivity and annual cycle of rehabilitated African Penguins following oiling. [poster].
- **Seventh Herpetological Association of Africa Symposium. 6–9 October 2004, Bayworld, Port Elizabeth.**
- Harrison J.A., Alexander G.J., Baard E.H.W., Bates M., Branch W.R., Cunningham M., Erasmus B., Foden W., Friedmann Y. & A. Turner.** A proposed conservation assessment and atlas for the reptiles of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland.
- **Eighth International Seabird Group Conference. North Atlantic Seabird Populations. 2–4 April 2004, University of Aberdeen, UK.**
- Mullers R.H.E., Navarro R.A., Underhill L.G. & Visser G.H.** How important is the timing of breeding in Cape Gannets? [poster].
- **16th International Congress of Arachnology. 2004. Ghent, Belgium.**
- Mukherjee A., Navarro R., Underhill L.G. & Lubin Y.** First record of spider diversity and abundance: Robben Island, South Africa.
- **25th Anniversary of the Bonn Convention Workshop. Successes to date and ways forward. Migratory Species: linking Ecosystems and Disciplines. June 2004, Berlin, Germany.**
- Cooper J.** Conserving migratory marine birds with the Bonn Convention and its daughter agreements. [presentation]
- **27th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. May–June 2004, Cape Town.**
- Cooper J. & De Villiers M.[S.]** Environmental management issues at South Africa's bases in the Southern Ocean. [poster].
- **2004 Fynbos Forum. 10–13 August 2004, Langebaan.**
- Williams A.J.** Feathered fynbos fauna foiled by fragmentation, felines, fire & formality: Will specialist shrubland birds survive in the Blouberg Conservation Area? [poster].
- Williams A.J.** Hidden menaces: impacts of roads and traffic on wildlife. [poster].
- Williams A.J., Harebottle D. & Wheeler M.** How significant are waterbird populations of Cape metropol wetlands? [poster].
- Williams A.J. & Parsons N.** Outbreaks of avian cholera: are Kelp Gulls culprits? [poster].
- **Transdisciplinary symposium on recent mass die-offs of Lesser Flamingos (*Phoeniconaias minor*) in eastern and southern Africa. 24–26 September 2004, Department of Veterinary Biosciences, College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois.**
- Anderson M.D. & Harebottle D.M.** Distribution, population status, breeding, movements and conservation of Greater and Lesser Flamingos in South Africa.
- **Waterbirds around the World Conference. 3–8 April 2004, Edinburgh, Scotland.**
- Cooper J.** Potential impacts of marine fisheries on migratory waterbirds of the Afrotropical Region. [presentation].

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- Cooper J. 2004.** Albatross research and conservation at South Africa's subantarctic Prince Edward Islands. *Bird Numbers* 13(1): 4–7.
- Du Toit M., Boere G.C., Cooper J., De Villiers M.S., Kemper J., Lenten B., Petersen S.L., Simmons R.E., Underhill L.G., Whittington P.A. & Byers O.P. 2003.** Conservation Assessment and Management Plan for southern African coastal seabirds. Avian Demography Unit & Apple Valley, Cape Town & Conservation Breeding Specialist Group.
- Harebottle D.M., Harrison J.A. & Navarro R.A. 2004.** Conservation of birds in Gauteng. Parts 1 & 2. ADU Research Report 60a & 60b. Avian Demography Unit, Cape Town.
- Harrison J.A. 2004.** Development of Arabella Golf Estate, Phase 2: Second assessment of impacts on vertebrate fauna. ADU Research Report 61. Avian Demography Unit, Cape Town.

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- Harrison J.A. & Young D.J. 2004.** CAR Information Sheet No. 1: How to count. ADU, Cape Town.
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- Harrison J.A., Maciver M. & Freeman B. 2004.** Bird monitoring on Intaka Island during 2003/04, and an overview of seven years of bird monitoring. ADU Research Report 63. Avian Demography Unit, Cape Town.
- Parsons N.J. & Underhill L.G. 2004.** The importance of the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station for coastal birds: conservation implications and recommendations. ADU Research Report 64. Avian Demography Unit, Cape Town.
- Pepper J. & Lotz C. 2004.** Introducing the Cape Eagle Owl Project. Bird Numbers 13(1): 45.
- Wheeler M.J. & Harebottle D.M. 2004.** Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC) Newsletter 24, June 2004.
- Wheeler M.J. 2004.** The Nest Record Card Scheme (NERCS). Bird Numbers 13(1): 42–43.
- Young D.J. 2004.** CAR Newsletter 16, June 2004. ADU, Cape Town.

#### Works of a popular nature

- Anon. [=Cooper, J.] 2004.** The ADU migrates to Scotland. Africa – Birds & Birding 9(4): 76.
- Cooper J. 2004.** Save that Wanderer! Quest Science for South Africa 1(1): 28–30.
- Griffin J. 2004.** 10 years – anniversary of the Apollo Sea oil spill. Sancor Newsletter 177, July 2004.
- Harebottle D. 2004.** Waterbird monitoring at Edith Stephens Wetland Park (ESWP). PSP News, Third Term. Newsletter of the Primary Science Programme. pp. 1–2.
- Harebottle D. 2004.** The Black-winged Stilts are breeding at ESWP. PSP News, Fourth Term. Newsletter of the Primary Science Programme. p. 2.
- Harebottle D. 2004.** Five years of bird ringing at Zandvlei Nature Reserve. Zandvlei Trust Newsletter No. 3: 7–8.
- Harebottle D. & Williams T. 2004.** How important are sportsfields for birds in Cape Town? Kite: 2–3.
- Harebottle D. & Williams T. 2004.** Sportsfields – how important are they for birds? Promerops 259: 12–13.
- Oschadleus D. 2004.** SAFRING News. Red-backed Shrike. Africa – Birds & Birding 9(4): 16.
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- Williams A.J. 2004.** Is that a Kelp, Cape or Khoisan Gull? Bird Numbers 13(1): 21–23.
- Williams A.J. & Parsons N. 2004.** Cholera catastrophes: are Kelp Gulls culprits? Bird Numbers 13(1): 8–10.
- Young D.J. 2004.** Coordinated Avifaunal Roadcounts (CAR) Project tracks the changes. KZN Birds 9: 15–16.
- Young D.J. 2004.** Big birds on farms – CAR project tracks the changes. Northern Natal Farmer Oct: 8.

*“You never did like  
my set of flying  
ducks, did you?”*



## Chirps from the past

This poem by Peter Steyn was originally published in 1973 under the pseudonym Petrunio in *The Honeyguide* (No. 73) in what was then the magazine of the Rhodesian Ornithological Society. Carl J. Vernon (last verse) was, and is, one of the finest field ornithologists in Africa. The common and scientific names in the poem are those that were current at the time and are listed in sequence:

*rufilata*: Tinkling Cisticola  
*ayresii*: Ayres' Cisticola  
*lais*: Wailing Cisticola  
*brunnescens*: Pale-crowned Cisticola  
*tinniensi*: Levaillant's Cisticola  
*natalensis*: Croaking Cisticola  
*chiniana*: Rattling Cisticola  
*erythrope*: Red-faced Cisticola



### Cisticoline blues (with apologies to the experts)

It requires only moderate skill  
 The Rhodesian Field Card to fill;  
 But when I get to CISTICOLA  
 My pen remains poised perpendicular.

What issues from that thorny scrub?  
 (Ah! there lies the rub)  
 Perhaps it is the muted cantata  
 Of skulking *rufilata*?

With snapping wings up on high  
 Flits diminutive *ayresii*;  
 But a view we're not allowed  
 As it flies above a cloud.

Lord knows I must be barmy  
 As I puff up Chimanimani;  
 Here's a grassy montane place,  
 Then that must be *Cisticola lais*.

Only an ass egregious  
 Searches woodland brachystegious

For pale-crowned *brunnescens*  
 Or frantic *tinniensi*.

In marshy ground seek Levaillant's  
 Where above its nest it shrieks defiance:  
 There too your binocs you may hoist  
 To spy *natalensis*, croaky-voiced.

In that acacia what is rattling  
 Like an antiquated Gatling?  
 I would gladly strangle with a liana  
 Yon tedious, raucous, *chiniana*.

Behold a wee exquisite nest  
 'Twixt leaves and cobwebs neatly pressed;  
 There it is, out it pops,  
 That red-faced craftsman *erythrope*.

My view of that bird was hazy;  
 Could it be the one that's Lazy?  
 Oh for the skill of a Vernon C.J.  
 To aid me on my cisticoline way!



## Birds in Culture: the Sacred Ibis



Figure of a Sacred Ibis 332–30 B.C. Egyptian. Bronze and wood covered with linen and gesso, 34 × 13 × 43 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The ibis was probably the first bird in the world ever to be protected. In ancient Egypt the offense of killing an ibis was punishable by death. The bird was sacred because it was believed that Thoth, the god of wisdom and learning, and scribe to Osiris, god of the dead and of the underworld, was incarnated as an ibis. (Thoth also had an incarnation as a baboon.) Thoth's name, written in hieroglyphics, is a picture of the ibis. It was believed that every individual sacred animal possessed a fragment of the sacred spirit of the god. One would gain favour with the god when one arranged for an animal to be embalmed.

Mummified remains of ibises have been found in many royal Egyptian tombs next to the gold, jewels and other treasures and a most remarkable discovery was made at the underground galleries beneath the temples at Saqqara. Dating back to the sixth century B.C., these catacombs were found to contain the mummified remains of between 1.5 and 4 million Sacred Ibises, about 800 000 falcons and about 400 baboons, individually

packed and stacked in elongated pottery jars, and wooden boxes in the case of the baboons. It seems that the priests raised the Sacred Ibises at a near-by lake, killed and embalmed them and sold the mummies to the believers visiting the temples. Evidently the understanding of the prohibition on killing ibises was somewhat elastic!

The Ibis was probably not indigenous to Egypt. It is likely that the first birds were captured on the shores of the Red Sea and brought to Egypt. At the time of the Roman conquest of Egypt, returning Romans introduced the Sacred Ibis into Italy. No Sacred Ibises have been recorded in Egypt since 1850 and the only remaining population north of the Sahara is in southern Iraq where it was fairly common in the 1970s.

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