

# A probable hybrid ibis near Port Wakefield, South Australia

PAUL TAYLOR

On 29 December 2020 I saw a flock of about 160 Australian White Ibis *Threskiornis molucca* (hereafter White Ibis) in a paddock 4 km SE of Port Wakefield. I checked if there were any Straw-necked Ibis *T. spinicollis*, as this species is uncommon in this area. I found one juvenile Straw-necked Ibis, but there was another ibis which had unusual markings (Figure 1). Its face was black, and neck, tail and underparts white, similar to either ibis species. The upper back was white, like White Ibis, while the rest of the back was black, like Straw-necked. The mainly white wings had black tips and broad margins on the rear underwing, and black on at least some of the upper wing (Figure 2), thus being intermediate between the mostly white wings of White Ibis and the mostly black wings of Straw-necked.

It is possible that this ibis is a colour mutation but because the colour pattern matches normal plumage in either White or Straw-necked Ibis, or both, in all parts of the bird that were visible, it is more likely to be a hybrid between these two species. The back of the head and the upper neck of the bird appear to be feathered, indicating that it was probably immature.

There are very few records of hybrid ibis in Australia. The South Australian Museum holds a study skin of an adult male White Ibis x Straw-necked Ibis hybrid (B60277), collected at the RAAF Base, Edinburgh, SA, in November 2011 by M. Young. Callaghan *et al.* (2017) reported on an apparent White x Straw-necked hybrid at an ibis breeding colony on the Lachlan River floodplain, southern central New South Wales. Their photographs and description of the bird show that it appears to be similar in plumage to the ibis near Port Wakefield. Johnston (2018) has recorded hybridisation of these two species

on Bird Island near Outer Harbour, South Australia, where they breed during winter-spring and where at least five mixed pairs of White and Straw-necked Ibis have nested since 2002. An adult hybrid photographed at Bird Island (Johnston 2018) closely resembles the Port Wakefield ibis, as does the SA Museum specimen; it is possible that the Bird Island colony is the source of both these birds.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank the Editor, Philippa Horton, for assistance in the preparation of this note.

## REFERENCES

- Callaghan, C. T., Ryall, S. and Kingsford, R. T. 2017. A probable Australian White Ibis *Threskiornis moluccus* x Straw-necked Ibis *T. spinicollis* hybrid. *Australian Field Ornithology* 34: 47-48.
- Johnston, G. R. 2018. *Colony Breeding Birds of Bird Island and the Northern Revetment at Outer Harbour, South Australia, July 2015 – June 2018*. South Australian Department for the Environment and Water, Adelaide.

**Paul Taylor**  
**Balaklava, SA 5461**  
[pwtaylor60@outlook.com](mailto:pwtaylor60@outlook.com)



**Figure 1.** An Australian White Ibis (left) and putative Australian White x Straw-necked Ibis (centre) in a paddock near Port Wakefield. Image Paul Taylor



**Figure 2.** The hybrid ibis in flight over a group of Australian White Ibis. Image Paul Taylor