

#### IBIS ON WESTERN EYRE PENINSULA.

When discussing the Australian White Ibis *Threskiornis molucca* in South Australia, Marchant and Higgins (1990) wrote, 'Generally in the eastern half, mostly in the South-east and on creeks flowing to Lake Eyre.' The distribution maps of Marchant and Higgins (1990) and Horton (2000) show no records for the western half of the State including Eyre Peninsula. Note though, that the map of Horton (2000) is based on an incomplete data set, i.e. only South Australian Museum specimens, recent Department for Environment observations and the first RAOU atlas (Blakers, Davies and Reilly 1984). However Parker *et al.* (1979) listed a sighting of a single bird at Big Swamp (c. 34°39'S, 135°42'E) on 29 March 1976 by C. Gill (SAOA 1976) and Ian Penna saw one at Mt Wedge (c. 33°28'S, 135°09'E) on 31 July 1988 (SAOA 1988).

Some recent observations much further west and north are therefore significant. On 3 November 2005, RS observed a mixed flock of 30 Australian White Ibis and 10 Straw-necked Ibis *T. spinicollis* standing in a dry pasture paddock 7 km W of Ceduna on the Denial Bay road (c. 32°06'S, 133°40'E). Shortly afterwards, on 15 November 2005 when at the Yalata Community School (c. 31°23'S, 131°37'E), the children said that they had seen a strange, large bird. After a short search RS and the children located a lone Australian White Ibis perched near the top of a mallee tree *Eucalyptus* sp. When teaching at Karcultaby, RS had previously seen a single

Australian White Ibis on the Poochera Golf Course (c. 32°43'S, 134°50'E) in November 1991. RS was familiar with Australian White and Straw-necked Ibis having grown up at Milang (c. 35°24'S, 138°58'E), Lake Alexandrina, where both are common.

The occurrence of Straw-necked Ibis near Ceduna is also significant since previous records from Eyre Peninsula have come mainly from the extreme south about Big and Little Swamps (Parker *et al.* 1979), with odd sightings on the eastern coast (Horton 2000). Trevor Cox (*in litt.*) has several records from the Port Neill area over the past 40 years including a flock of 40 in the Pt Neill–Butler Tanks area (c. 34°07'S, 136°21'E to 34°06'S, 136°11'E) throughout February 2006. There is however a record of several on the Nullarbor Plain, near Ooldea (c. 30°27'S, 131°50'E), seen by S.A. White (1919). Also, G. Carpenter (*in litt.*) observed five flying in a westerly direction, 13 km E of the Nullarbor Roadhouse on 17 November 1995 and three standing in the roadhouse carpark (c. 31°26'S, 130°54'E) on 6 November 2001. Parker *et al.* (1979) speculated that, since Waterman, Close and Condon (1971) had shown that Straw-necked Ibis from colonies at Bool Lagoon in the South East and in Lake Alexandrina mostly moved off to the north and east, then possibly those on the Nullarbor Plain originated from Western Australia. If this were so, then arguably birds from Yalata and Ceduna came from the west.

I, however, favour a South Australian origin for

these birds. A wetter season may have induced some birds to move in a different manner. White commented that his sighting was made during a good season. It is known that in good seasons birds from South Australian nesting sites (South East, River Murray and lakes) move north and west to the Adelaide Plains and Lower North regions and few would doubt that those reaching lower and eastern Eyre Peninsula were not part of this movement. Serventy and Whittell (1967) commented that in the irruption year of 1952 the Straw-necked Ibis occurred everywhere in south-western Western Australia from the North West to the Nullarbor Plain and considered that most had come south from the Kimberly Division. They further stated that it was possible that many individuals of the Straw-necked Ibis and also the White-necked Heron *Ardea pacifica* may have originated from the eastern states. Johnstone and Storr (1998) also spoke of the augmentation of south-western populations by occasional irruptions from northern or eastern Australia despite two records of birds banded in the south-west being found in the eastern states and no banding evidence, as yet, of reverse movement.

However Australian White Ibis are not yet plentiful in south-western Western Australia and this would mitigate against a western origin for the ibis at Ceduna. This may soon alter for although unknown in the south-west prior to 1952 and not beginning to breed there until the 1970s, its numbers are now said to be increasingly rapidly (Johnstone and Storr 1998). Its ability to exist in urban areas and thrive in rubbish dumps has led to it becoming a pest in some areas of the eastern states. Similar tendencies becoming evident in South Australia (e.g. Wingfield dump in metropolitan Adelaide) could contribute to changes in distribution.

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