

The Australian White Ibis is commonly seen in Brisbane and its suburbs. It's often called the "bin chicken" or "bin chook" because of its tendency to scavenge food that people throw into rubbish bins or leave lying around in parks and school grounds within Brisbane and other capital cities.

However, the name, "bin chook", is very insulting for a bird that has been around for longer than humans and a bird that has recently learnt to cleverly take advantage of the wasteful habits of people living in the city.

But fifty years ago White Ibis were rare in Brisbane. However, their numbers have increased dramatically even over the last 10 years.

In the past, ibis lived mainly in the outback and nested in trees along inland rivers and lakes. But over the last fifty years farmers have been using water from these rivers to grow their crops, and sheep and cattle have trampled the edges of the rivers and lakes causing damage to the ibis's environment. This caused many ibis to move to the coast where they could forage on mudflats in the mangroves.

At the same time, zoos in Sydney, Melbourne and the Gold Coast were keeping ibis and other birds in aviaries. After these birds had babies the zoo keepers often released them. These ibis then joined wild ibis that had migrated from the inland to the coast and soon established colonies in cities around Australia, including Brisbane.

Why have Ibis become so common? The short answer is: it's a very adaptable species. Although the ibis is mainly a wetlands bird which feeds on aquatic animals like frogs, crayfish, shrimps and snails, it has learnt to eat our kind of food and where to get it.

For example, people often feed ibis at outdoor cafes and picnic areas, showing these intelligent birds that food can be found on and under tables.

Now many people consider the ibis as a pest, because of their scavenging habits, droppings, dirtiness and smell.

There is a possibility that ibis can transmit diseases to humans in such places, and because of this risk, and many public complaints, councils have been forced to "control" ibis by destroying their nests and eggs.

Ibis are also not welcome near airports because of the hazard they can present to aircraft by possibly flying into the flight path of aircraft as they are taking off or coming in to land. This could lead to ibis being sucked into jet aircraft engines, causing damage to the engines and creating a potentially dangerous situation.

Because of the sudden population boom of city ibis, some people believe it's not a native species and has been introduced from elsewhere. This isn't true.

The Australian White Ibis is a native bird that has adapted exceptionally well to city life.

So instead of being treated as a nuisance, it should be appreciated and respected as one of the relatively few native species that has learnt to exploit a human-dominated environment.