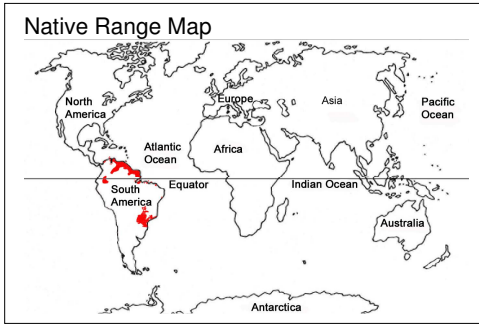


### Native Range Map



## Scarlet Ibis

Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Subphylum: Vertebrata  
Class: Aves  
Order: Ciconiiformes  
Family: Threskiornithidae  
Genus: *Eudocimus*  
Species: *ruber*



Photo courtesy of Lynne Panebianco

### Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The scarlet ibis is native to the tropical regions of northern South America from Venezuela to eastern Brazil and coastal islands. They inhabit fresh and salt water estuaries, swamps, lagoons, shallow bays, marshes, mud flats, and mangrove trees.
- **Exhibit Location:** Diversity of Birds

### Characteristics

- Length: 30 inches (males slightly larger than females); Wingspan: up to 38 inches
- The scarlet ibis is a shorebird with bright red plumage, a result of their diet that includes carotene-rich crustaceans.
- Both sexes are alike with long spindly legs, partially webbed feet, a long and slender neck, a short, stubby tail, and a long downward curving bill which is longer and thicker on the male. They range from pink to bright red with black tipped feathers on the wing tips. The red coloration intensifies as the bird grows older.
- The young are dull grayish-brown with white undersides.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** about 16-20 years; **In Captivity** about 20 years; record is 31 years

### Behaviors

- Ibis are social birds that fly and feed in flocks of up to 30 birds.
- Scarlet ibis are strong fliers and swimmers. They fly with their necks extended.
- Flocks fly in a V formation to decrease the wind resistance. When the leader tires, it falls to the back of the formation and another ibis takes over.
- Scarlet ibis live and forage for food with other types of wading birds like herons and egrets. Although they can live harmoniously with other species of birds, they also defend their individual space very aggressively.
- They find their prey by rooting around with their bill in the mud at the bottom of riverbanks and edges of large bodies of water.
- The males and females make greeting displays (attention-getting movements or sounds) and wrap their necks around each other.
- Ibises are a rather quiet bird, only grunting or croaking on breeding grounds. Honking is heard when there is a disturbance in the nest or when the male is courting a female. Females make a squealing sound during courtship. The young make a shrill cry when hungry.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** mealworms raked into the sand, whole fish

### Reproduction

- Sexual maturity is reached at 2 years of age. Males are polygamous (often mate with more than one female) and use displays of preening, flights, head rubbing, and a rocking motion to attract a mate.
- Scarlet ibis congregate in colonies of several hundred at breeding time, nesting on dense brush and mangrove-covered islands and shore areas near river mouths.
- Nests are round and made of loosely packed twigs usually located in treetops overlooking water. A clutch consists of 3-5 dull green, brown-streaked eggs. Incubation lasts between 19 and 23 days.

- Both parents incubate, care for, and protect the young which fledge (develop flight feathers) after 35 days and are independent in 75 days.

### Diet

- **In the Wild:** crabs, mollusks, small fish, frogs, insects, shrimp, other crustaceans, small snakes
- **At the Zoo:** worms, seeds, meal mix and crustaceans

### Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** LC (Least Concern); **CITES Appendix:** II
- While not threatened at this time, they are hunted for their vivid feathers, meat and harvesting of eggs. Loss of foraging, nesting and feeding grounds and heavy pollution are also creating problems for this species.
- Trinidad has set aside a sanctuary called “Caroni Swamp” that includes 15 thousand acres of marshland, tidal lagoons and mangrove trees as a refuge for these birds.
- The ibis are also protected by the US Migratory Bird Treaty Act, but the law enforcement is weak.
- Predators: humans, large cats and birds of prey

### Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- The scarlet ibis is closely related to the American white ibis and is sometimes considered the same species.
- It is the national bird of Trinidad and Tobago.
- “Ibis” is derived from the Greek meaning “religious worship, sacred bird” and in ancient Egypt, the sacred ibis was held in high reverence: mummified and buried in temples with the Pharaohs.
- Fossil records of ibis go back 60 million years to the Eocene period.

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