



Sacred Ibis – *Threskiornis aethiopicus*

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Recognition

- The Sacred Ibis is a large mainly white bird with a black head and a long heavy downward curving bill.
- Both sexes are similar in size and colouration.
- They are around 70 cm in length with a wingspan of 112-124 cm.



Native range

- Their native range is sub-Saharan Africa where they are widespread.
- There is a small and declining population in Iraq and they were formerly recorded in Egypt.
- There is no fossil evidence that this species was native in Europe.

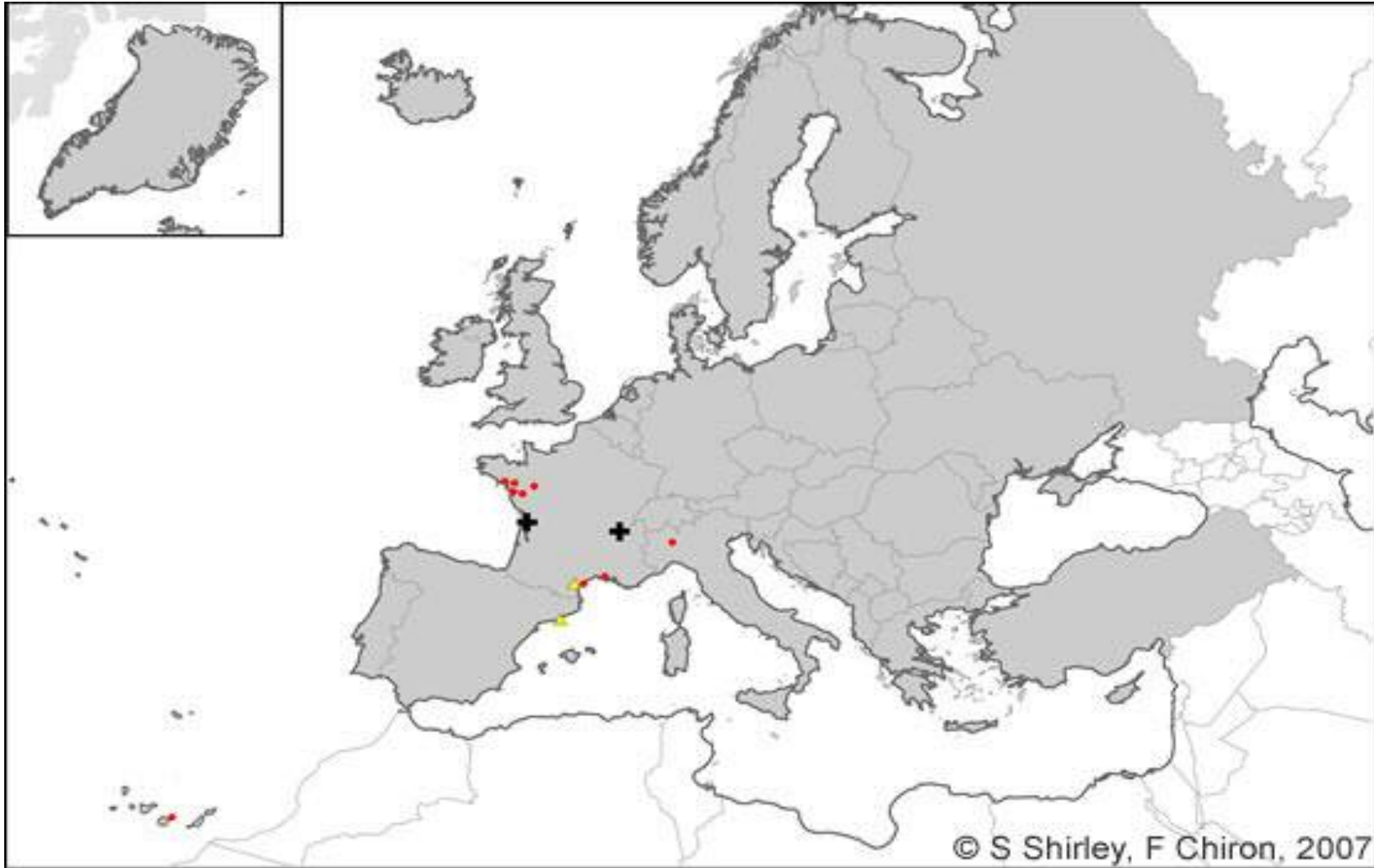


European range

- Since the 1970s the incidence of birds being recorded in the wild has increased dramatically.
- Breeding populations are established in Spain, Italy, France and the Canary Islands and other individuals being recorded from other countries.
- An assessment in 2000 reported about 30 records of escapes in Britain.



Sacred ibis in Europe



KEY



Known distribution



Extinct



Eradicated

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Breeding colonies and range in Europe in 2005. The main French dispersal areas are shown.



(Yésou & Clergeau)

Issues

- Omnivorous and an opportunistic feeder
- Favours invertebrates but takes fish, amphibians, eggs and young birds
- Farmland slurry and rubbish dumps



Predation

- Taking eggs from a sandwich tern colony
- Colonies of black and whiskered terns have been destroyed
- Common tern, mallards and lapwing also been effected amongst other species
- Predation of newts



Caught in the act



- **These two visited the colony of Sandwich terns on one day in July 2004 and devoured all the eggs of 30 pairs in four hours.**
- **This cause the colony to desert for the rest of the season**

Adult Sacred Ibises, Vendée, France, July 2004 (Mattieu Vaslin).



Trends

- In France the population has increased significantly
- On the Atlantic coast of France, 30 individuals were imported to a zoological park during the 1970s and 1980s
- The feral population had reached around 3,000 individuals by winter 2004/05.
- On the Mediterranean coast of France, 8 individuals were imported to a zoological park in 1982, and these birds escaped to form another feral population, which was estimated to hold at least 250 birds in 2005.

Prognosis

- Likely to be further escapes from captivity
- Vagrants from western France and the Netherlands
- Currently not self-sustaining populations but this seems likely to change

