

WORD OF THE MONTH

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tip turkey

- **noun:** the white ibis, *Threskiornis moluccus*, often regarded as a pest in urban areas because of its scavenging at tips, etc.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

The Australian white ibis, *Threskiornis moluccus*, is widespread across Australia, and naturally inhabits wetlands where it feeds on small invertebrates, especially crustaceans. As part of the ibis family the white ibis has a characteristic long downward-curved bill. Since the 1970s the bird has increasingly been found in urban centres, largely as a result of the decline in the bird's natural habitat due to intensive farming, urban sprawl, and periods of drought. It has successfully adapted to the urban environment by scavenging on the food refuse of the human population. This scavenging habit has seen numbers increase in many city centres including Sydney's:

'The species is a wetland forager', wildlife officer John Martin, from the Royal Botanic Gardens, says. 'Now it forages in inland parks and landfill'. During the peak of its spring breeding season, more than 9000 of the birds call Sydney home. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 2013)

The interaction between humans and white ibises in urban areas in recent years has led to an increasingly disparaging view of this bird with a correspondingly negative vocabulary to describe it. **Tip turkey** is just one of a number of terms now used to describe the Australian white ibis. Others include *bin chicken*, *dump chook*, *dumpster diver*, and *flying rat*. **Tip turkey**, like *bin chicken* and *dump chook*, associates the ibis with stupidity, as well as with garbage and refuse.

The unflattering description of the ibis as a **tip turkey** is a relatively recent appellation, but one that has grown in frequency since the first evidence for the term in 2009. This has perhaps matched the growing presence of the birds and their scavenging habits:

Known as the **tip turkey**, the bird's reputation for ferreting through inner-city bins and scavenging street garbage has not endeared it to the public. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 2013)

But no matter how much these birds have been denigrated in recent times they now occupy a permanent place in the Australian urban landscape:

They're the bird Sydneysiders love to hate, but the native white ibis, or **tip turkey** as they're sometimes known, are true city slickers. (*Sydney Sun-Herald*, 20 October 2013)

In March 2015, artist Robert Hains won second place in Brisbane City Council's Recycling Art competition with a kinetic sculpture inspired by the white ibis and built out of items found at the tip. He gave his creation the name **Tip Turkey**.

Tip turkey will be included in the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.



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