

Australian birds with cocky attitude

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A long-beaked Ibis bird looks for food scraps from a bin at Sydney's tourist precinct, Circular Quay. It's not yet Bodega Bay from Hitchcock's "The Birds", but birds are increasingly becoming a concern for inhabitants of Australia's biggest city Sydney, with large colonies of the long-beaked ibis stalking the bins.

It's not yet the Bodega Bay of Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds", but winged creatures are increasingly becoming a concern for inhabitants of Australia's biggest city.

Large colonies of the white, long-beaked native ibis stalk the garbage

bins of Sydney, flocks of native cockatoos chew away at timber structures and Australian Noisy Miner birds are, well ... noisy.

"The white ibis is pretty common around schoolyards and teachers have to train the kids how to stand up against the bird," says dedicated bird watcher Mark David. "Ibis routinely run up to them and snatch their lunch."

"They've got a very long beak that intimidates young kids. And see, if people feed them, then they're used to grabbing their share."

Last month in Brisbane, a law student was ordered to undertake 120 hours of community service after he struggled over his sandwich with an ibis and eventually stomped the animal to death.

The student's lawyer told the court that her client reacted violently because he was once attacked by a large crow and had been frightened of Australian birds ever since.

While such terror -- and violent reaction -- is uncommon, strollers at Sydney's Opera House and ferry wharves know that to eat a chocolate croissant in front of hundreds of seagulls is not a smart move.

On the campus of Sydney University, despite huge flocks of parrots flying from tree to tree distracting drivers passing by, ibis remain the main subject of wonder and disgust.



A pelican is seen here sitting on a street light at Narrabeen, on the northern beaches of Sydney. It's not yet the Bodega Bay of Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds", but winged creatures are increasingly becoming a concern for inhabitants of Australia's biggest city.

"These filthy creatures strut across campus tarnishing our otherwise impeccable stretches of glorious green grass, foraging and breeding with frightening intensity," writes Michelle Garrett in student newspaper *Honi Soit*.

But it's not only a story of birds pestering humans.

"Ibis have also been known to cause a nuisance for [captive animals](#) at wildlife parks," reports Mark David. "At feeding time the ibis run in and grab the food meant for other animals."

Other surprising problems can also arise when birds and humans meet.

In some parts of Sydney, locals wake up to see their timber decking looking like the scene of a chainsaw massacre. The cause of the mess? Sulfur-crested cockatoos; birds that chew wood to keep their beak healthy.

"They eat fruit from peoples' trees and the wood on verandahs and window sills," explains Kris French; a member of Birds in Backyards, a conservation programme focusing on birds living in cities.

"They usually chew branches of trees," says Adrian Davis, a PhD student at Sydney University studying parrot populations, "but they can adapt quite well to the city and yes; sometimes people get their house chewed."



A parrot is seen here in Sydney. It's not yet the Bodega Bay of Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds", but winged creatures are increasingly becoming a concern for inhabitants of Australia's biggest city.

Davis said the density of parrots in Sydney exceeds that of parrots in the

Royal National Park, south of the city.

"Over the past 20 to 30 years, the population has been growing," he explains. "A few of them are birds which have been released from cages, but the bulk of them are part of a colony which used to enjoy the wetlands that existed prior to the settlement of the first pioneers."

Most complaints originate from the thunderous and vibrant chorus.

The noisy miner, a native with a distinctive, high-pitched call also known as a 'squeaker', and the koel, a large cuckoo bird, are the most common troublemakers.

"The problem is that they are nocturnal birds. I personally like their sound, but some people don't," Davis said.

Some people really don't.

"Frankly, sometimes, especially in the morning I wish I could set the damn bustling tree on fire," says Masha Poursanidou, a university student who lives in inner Sydney.

"Some of them make a very strange noise. Once I thought my neighbours were having a very good time until I realised it was a bird that was doing the bunga-bunga."



An elderly man is seen here sitting on a park bench while surrounded by birds, in Sydney. It's not yet the Bodega Bay of Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds", but winged creatures are increasingly becoming a concern for inhabitants of Australia's biggest city.

Mark David said some people are so used to the ruckus they use birds nesting in their gardens as a reliable indicator of people entering their garden, removing the need for a doorbell.

"Noisy miners make so much noise! Some people literally use them as a warning call."

To Davis, the birds are not the ones to blame.

"They were living there in the first place, because of us they have to adapt to the urban environment," he said.

"Some species disappear, some adapt as they can. Moreover, when people get their house chewed by cockatoos, it's usually because they fed them before or they attracted them one way or another."

Native birds are all protected so it is forbidden to kill them. But golf courses can apply for licences to shoot birds if they become too much of a problem while frustrated residents recommend cats and waterpistols to remove annoying birds.

But as French notes: "Cats wouldn't have a hope of catching a cockatoo."

So what is there to do? Not much, says Davis. "There are some recordings of their natural predators that can ward them off. But even in the case of ibis droppings, [birds](#) remain a minor problem. The best thing to do is to enjoy the great diversity of Sydney's bird population."

French agrees: "Watch and don't interfere -- and please, stop feeding them..."

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