



Subscribe Now

NEWS

Local & State

- [Bonita Springs](#)
- [Cape Coral](#)
- [Estero](#)
- [Fort Myers](#)
- [Lehigh Acres](#)
- [Naples](#)
- [North Fort Myers](#)
- [San Carlos Park](#)
- [South Fort Myers](#)

Local News (by topic)

- [Crime](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Español](#)
- [Environment](#)
- [Growth & Dev](#)
- [Hurricane Issues](#)
- [Obituaries](#)

Sports

- [Golf | Tee Times](#)
- [Outdoors](#)
- [Prep Sports](#)

Lifestyles

- [Celebrations](#)
- [Health & Fitness](#)

Business

- [Stock Quotes](#)

Opinion

- [Blogs](#)
- [Columnists](#)
- [Forums](#)

Nation & World

Photo galleries

Video galleries

Archives

Search Southwest Florida

ADVERTISEMENT

Scarlet ibis a spectacular stranger

Exotic native to Trinidad, Venezuela spotted here, albeit rarely

By Kevin Lollar
 klollar@news-press.com
 Originally posted on January 10, 2007

Roseate spoonbills? Drab.

Painted buntings? Dull.

Scarlet tanagers? Colossally lusterless.

If you want to see an eye-poppingly colorful bird in Southwest Florida, check out a scarlet ibis.



A scarlet ibis takes flight from a red mangrove limb at the entrance of Hell Peckney Bay near Estero Bay. The bird is a rare sight in Southwest Florida.

Provided, of course, you can find one: These bright birds are few (nobody knows how many) and far between (you never know when they'll turn up, or where).

Their scarceness is not because they're endangered; it's because they're exotic — non-native. In short, this cousin of the native white ibis doesn't belong here.

"I've never seen one in Florida," said Mike Knight, a



Photos by Andrew West/news-press.com

A scarlet ibis sits on a mangrove snag with a related bird, a white ibis, at Hell Peckney Bay near Estero Bay on Friday. These birds are rarely seen in Southwest Florida and are most likely offspring or zoo escapees. This one was seen feeding on a mudflat until the tide rose and it flew into a mangrove forest. The scarlet ibis is known to cross-breed with the white ibis.

[Order Picture](#)

ABOUT THE SCARLET IBIS

Scientific name: *Eudocimus ruber*

ADVERTISEMENTS



BREAK THROUGH



[CLICK HERE >](#)

ENTERTAINMENT

[Arts & Theater](#)

[Beaches](#)

[Boating & Fishing](#)

[Dating](#)

[Destinations](#)

[Dining](#)

[Movies](#)

[Music: VibeWire](#)

[Travel](#)

SERVICES

[Desktop Weather](#)

[Email News](#)

[News Feeds](#) 

[npsmobile.com](#)

[Text Messaging](#)

resource manager at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Collier County. "We have a lot of avid birders out here, and I've heard them talk about scarlet ibis when they've seen them.

"Their natural range includes Trinidad and Venezuela. I've been down there and seen them fly overhead by the thousands. The sky lights up neon red with these birds against the setting sun."

So, what is this neon-red Caribbean and South American bird doing in Southwest Florida?

Part of the answer is that it was introduced.

In July 1961 a man named Carter Bundy put 22 scarlet ibis eggs from Trinidad into white ibis nests at the Greynolds Park rookery near Miami.

Seventeen scarlet ibis hatched and fledged.

Not much is known about Bundy or his motivation.

"He was probably an avocational ornithologist," said Jerry Jackson, a professor of biology at Florida Gulf Coast University. "He wasn't a well-known ornithologist. He probably was one of those rich people who just wanted to contribute something to Florida."

Bundy's 17 fledgling birds were not the first scarlet ibises in Florida: The earliest reports are from 1888, Jackson said.

"There's a long history of scarlet ibises in Florida," he said. "Some are believed to have escaped from Busch Gardens or from Disney World. They're found throughout the state. Most reports are from South Florida, but they're also in Tampa and the Panhandle. They keep showing up. It's a story that never ends."

Some scarlet ibises might have strayed naturally into Florida, Knight said.

One scarlet ibis has had a following among area birders since 1990.

"The bird in question started showing up in Punta Gorda on a golf course," said naturalist Vince McGrath, field trip chairman of the Caloosa Bird Club. "The habitat changed, and we found it foraging in ditches along U.S. 41. Then it found its way down and started nesting in Lakes Park. Now it's roosting at a church on Fort Myers Beach."

Distribution: Venezuela to eastern Brazil, and Trinidad and Tobago, where it is the national bird.

Habitat: Swampy areas such as mud flats and shallow bays.

Life span: Life span data for the scarlet ibis are scarce, but its close relative, the white ibis, lives for about 15 years in the wild and 20 in captivity.

Diet: Crustaceans, aquatic insects, amphibians, mollusks, small snakes, small fish

Enemies: Large cats, birds of prey, humans (scarlet ibis are still hunted for meat, eggs and plumage).

—Source: University of Michigan

ALSO FROM NEWS-PRESS.COM

► **Photo Gallery:** [Scarlet Ibis](#)

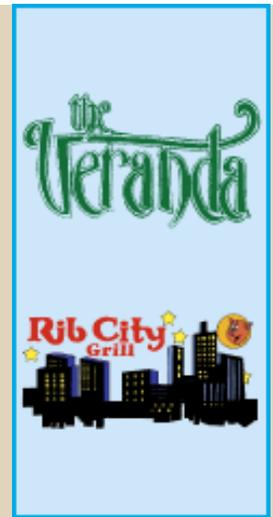
DELIVERING YOUR WORLD

[Subscribe to The News-Press](#)

[Place a classified ad](#)

[Printer friendly version](#)

[Email this article](#)



TEACHERS & Teacher's Aides. FT or PT no exp nec. CHEERS 275-

Charlotte Behavioral Health Care

Dental Office Manager-Naples Outstanding

Canterbury School is seeking a

MACHINISTS NEEDED TO OPERATE BRAND NEW MACHINES

..... ADVERTISEMENT

FGCU Graduate Studies is accepting applications

Graduate programs in:

- business
- education
- health professions
- social work
- English
- public administration
- environmental science
- counseling

Click now for more information
www.fgcu.edu/graduate
 or call (239) 590-7908



Scarlet ibises are reported to be breeding with white ibises to produce pink offspring.

"It might be the same as crossing red and white flowers," Knight said. "Red is dominant, and white's recessive, so you produce some red flowers and some white flowers. Sometimes there's incomplete dominance, and the red is not fully expressed. That's where you get pink. I'm not sure that happens in birds, but it's possible."

While genetics plays a role in the scarlet ibis' dramatic color, so does a diet of crustaceans, which are rich in carotene, an orange or red pigment also found in carrots.

During the past century, hundreds of plant and animal species have been introduced to Florida. Some — such as melaleuca, Brazilian pepper, Burmese pythons and cane toads — have become pests.

What about the scarlet ibis?

"At the moment, there are no problems we know of," Jackson said. "But given time, under the right circumstances, it could compete with local species and be a problem. It's not likely, but the key is you can never tell whether exotic species are going to be a biological explosion or not."

« [Return to previous page](#)

For similar stories [search our paid archives](#) dating back to 1999.

TOP HEADLINES FROM ENVIRONMENT

[Record number of manatees die in 2006](#)

[Yellow jacket nest found on Indian mound](#)

[Cape man hospitalized after bee attack](#)

[Lee pitches more recycling](#)

[Pinchers drives to get most mileage out of fryer oil](#)

ALSO ON NEWS-PRESS.COM

[Eagles dominating country statistically](#)

[Roast garlic and keep it on hand](#)

[Holiday overloads bag conveyor](#)

[Support recycling proposal](#)

To e-mail this article just enter the following information:

Recipient's e-mail:

Sender's name:

**EMPLOYMENT
OPPORTUNITY! Do
you have an interest
in..**

**STAFFING
SPECIALIST**

**Metal Framing
Supervisor w/layout
exp**

[All Top Jobs](#)

[About Top Jobs](#)