

'Hated' Australian bird dealing with invasive species

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A bird that has been widely reviled in Australia for decades has undergone an image change. The reason is that it is helping to get rid of an even bigger nuisance - the invasive cane toad. The bird is the white ibis, which is indigenous to Australia. It is

viewed as a pest by many Australians because of its propensity to scavenge food from garbage bags and trash cans. It even steals food right out of people's hands. People nickname them the "bin chicken". The word "bin" is Australian and British English for trash can. The birds are now being viewed in a positive light. They have adapted and learnt how to eat the poisonous and destructive cane toad. As a result, Australia's natural habitat is benefitting.

Cane toads were introduced to Australia in the 1930s. Sugar farmers thought they would help in eradicating a beetle that was devastating their crops. However, the toads soon began to wreak havoc as they rapidly spread across the countryside. They ate many insects and small animals to the point of extinction. Their toxin is strong enough to kill most native animals that eat frogs and toads. They had no natural predators in Australia, until the white ibis learnt to rid them of their venom and gulp them up. An Australian journalist said the ibises pick the toads up and "flick them about". The stress of this makes the toads release all their poison. The ibises then wash them in water and gobble them down.

Sources: pedestrian.tv / bbc.com / junkee.com

Writing

Countries should seek to eradicate all invasive species. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

bird / Australia / image change / nuisance / indigenous / scavenge / garbage bags / sugar / farmers / beetle / toads / crops / havoc / extinction / predators / poison

True / False

- 1) The white ibis is bedevilled in Australia. T / F
- 2) The white ibis is now helping to rid Australia of a deadly frog. T / F
- 3) Many people in Australia think the white ibis is a nuisance and a pest. T / F
- 4) The article says the white ibis looks great in the light. T / F
- 5) Cane toads arrived in Australia on trading ships 200 years ago. T / F
- 6) Farmers thought cane toads could help them get rid of a beetle. T / F
- 7) There were no animals in Australia that naturally kill the cane toad. T / F
- 8) White ibises wash the cane toads before eating them. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

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|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. reviled | a. dying out |
| 2. nuisance | b. rubbish |
| 3. propensity | c. exterminating |
| 4. trash | d. anxiety |
| 5. poisonous | e. run down |
| 6. eradicating | f. pest |
| 7. havoc | g. swallow |
| 8. extinction | h. toxic |
| 9. gulp | i. destruction |
| 10. stress | j. tendency |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you know about invasive species?
- b) What do you know about toads?
- c) Are there any birds in your country that are unpopular?
- d) What do you think of birds that scavenge for food?
- e) What useful scavengers are in the animal kingdom?
- f) What are the biggest pests in your country?
- g) What do you think of your country's natural habitat?
- h) What Australian creatures do you like?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. A bird that has been widely | a. of extinction |
| 2. helping to get rid of an even | b. positive light |
| 3. indigenous to | c. eradicating a beetle |
| 4. now being viewed in a | d. bigger nuisance |
| 5. Australia's natural habitat is | e. release all their poison |
| 6. help in | f. benefitting |
| 7. the toads soon began to wreak | g. reviled in Australia |
| 8. to the point | h. predators |
| 9. They had no natural | i. Australia |
| 10. The stress of this makes the toads | j. havoc |

Discussion – Student B

- What do you think about what you read?
- What damage do invasive species do?
- What animals wreak havoc in your country?
- How can we stop creatures from becoming extinct?
- Should all countries rid their habitats of invasive species?
- What are your hopes for the white ibises in Australia?
- How else could Australia deal with the toads?
- What questions would you like to ask a cane toad expert?

Spelling

- A bird that has been widely dveirel
- Get rid of an even bigger neuniacs
- The white ibis, which is gnuosienid to Australia
- ecnsgvae food from garbage bags.
- the poisonous and cvtrrieudes cane toad
- Australia's natural aabtthi is benefitting
- They would help in cigaadtienr a beetle
- the toads soon began to rwkea_oavhc
- to the point of icnieotxnt
- They had no natural tesdorrap in Australia
- rid them of their mnevo
- wash them in water and beobgl them down

Answers – Synonym Match

1. e	2. f	3. j	4. b	5. h
6. c	7. i	8. a	9. g	10. d

Role Play

Role A – Emus

You think emus are the best birds. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their birds. Also, tell the others which is the least interesting of these (and why): seagulls, eagles or parrots.

Role B – Seagulls

You think seagulls are the best birds. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their birds. Also, tell the others which is the least interesting of these (and why): emus, eagles or parrots.

Role C – Eagles

You think eagles are the best birds. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their birds. Also, tell the others which is the least interesting of these (and why): seagulls, emus or parrots.

Role D – Parrots

You think parrots are the best birds. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their birds. Also, tell the others which is the least interesting of these (and why): seagulls, eagles or emus.

Speaking – Birds

Rank these with your partner. Put the best birds at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| • Ibises | • Pigeons |
| • Emus | • Eagles |
| • Seagulls | • Peacocks |
| • Chickens | • Parrots |

Answers – True False

1 F	2 F	3 T	4 F	5 F	6 T	7 T	8 T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.