

OCCURRENCE OF FOUR SPECIES OF IBIS NEAR
DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA

Gary R. Gaston

There are four species of true Ibis (Family: Threskiornithidae) which occur along the Alabama coastline: Glossy Ibis, White-faced Ibis, White Ibis, and Scarlet Ibis. All four have been sighted near Dauphin Island during the past year, but apparently only the Glossy Ibis nests in the area. The Wood Ibis is actually a member of the stork family (Ciconiidae), and should not be included with this group.

Glossy Ibis (Plegadis falcinellus (Linnaeus)) have been observed nesting at Cat Island, Alabama (near Dauphin Island) for several years. A study of the avifauna of Cat Island was undertaken in 1975, being concluded in September, 1976. Data from this study show that seven Glossy Ibis nests were identified on the island in 1976, and once hatched all of the young birds survived to fledgling status. The nests observed each contained 3 eggs, with one exception: on May 26 a nest was located with a clutch of 6 eggs. This nest was later abandoned and a second nest constructed within a few feet of the first. Photograph records of both young and adult birds were made.

The White-faced Ibis (Plegadis chihi (Vieillot)), though very similar to the Glossy Ibis, does not share Cat Island as nesting habitat. One adult specimen was photographed on the west end of Dauphin Island in September, 1975, but it was not in breeding plumage. The Alabama coastline is included within the nesting range of these birds, but thus far nesting records are not available.

The White Ibis (Eudocimus albus (Linnaeus)) is a permanent resident in Alabama, and extensive records have been kept on their breeding in our state. They are uncommon along the coastline, however, and only the immature birds have been observed at close hand over the past year. One immature White Ibis was observed during the breeding season on June 16, 1976, on Cat Island (personal observation), but it did not take up residence. During the week of June 20, 1976, a similar White Ibis fed daily along the ditches of the east end of Dauphin Island (personal observation). Apparently the same bird returned in September, being photographed in the area occupied by the bird.

The Scarlet Ibis (Eudocimus ruber (Linnaeus)) is rarely observed along the northern Gulf coast, and only one record is available for Alabama (May 9, 1964). This species breeds primarily in South America, principally in the countries bordering the Caribbean. On July 24, 1976, a Scarlet Ibis was observed flying with a pair of Glossy Ibis one mile north of the Dauphin Island bridge (Gary Gaston and Dr. M. Susan Ivester). The Scarlet Ibis appeared pink, but its coloration may have been due to light penetration of the primary and tail feathers, as occurs with the tail of the Red-tailed Hawk.

It is possible that this individual was the result of recent introduction of the Scarlet Ibis in rookeries near Miami (James Peavy, Jr., personal communication). Tom Imhof (personal communication) suggests it may have been a hybrid between the White and Scarlet Ibis, for which no description is available.

P. O. Box 386
Dauphin Island, AL 36528

For further comment on the status of nesting herons on Cat Island, see American Birds Vol. 30, No. 5, p. 965. Ed.