

FIRST BREEDING RECORD OF WHITE-FACED IBIS FOR ALABAMA

AND A NEW AREA OF PLEGADIS SYMPATRY

Charles D. Duncan and Paul G. Johnson

An unconfirmed report of White-faced Ibis (Plegadis chihi) breeding on Cat Island, Alabama, during June, 1976, has appeared [J. R. Stewart, 1976, Regional Report (Central Southern Region), American Birds 30:966]. Such a record would be the first breeding record for the state and would be all the more significant, in that the Glossy Ibis (Plegadis falcinellus) also breeds on Cat Island (G. R. Gaston, 1976, Alabama Birdlife 24:14). The American Birds report is surprising in that at least 62 Plegadis (12 falcinellus and 50 chihi) are mentioned as breeding. Nonetheless, during Gaston's and Johnson's (1977, Northeast Gulf Science 1:14) extensive observations of the heronry there during the same period, one of us (PGJ) saw only three pairs of Plegadis on a regular basis and only three Plegadis nests were found.

We are now able to confirm the breeding of the White-faced Ibis on Cat Island during both the 1976 and 1977 breeding seasons. The island has been previously described by Gaston and Johnson (1977). During the first week of June, 1977, we made several trips to the island during the early morning hours. Six Plegadis were observed on each occasion. Two of these were firmly identified as White-faced Ibises on the basis of the wide white patch of feathers bordering the face, the rusty-red color of the face and legs and the bright red iris (H. Pratt, 1976, Birding 8:1), all clearly visible through a twenty-power spotting scope. No more than two of the birds could be identified at any one time, but at no time did we see a bird which could be firmly identified as a Glossy Ibis. We obtained clear color photographs of one of the birds identified as a White-faced Ibis and have deposited them with the Alabama Ornithological Society Slide Collection (c/o Mrs. Helen Kittinger, 1612 Colesbury Circle, Birmingham, Alabama 35226). In addition, a Plegadis nest was found in the same marsh elder (Iva frutescens) where the White-faced Ibis was photographed and repeatedly seen to alight, confirming that the birds were indeed breeding and not merely transients. Two other Plegadis nests were also found, thereby accounting for all the ibises regularly seen on the island during the 1977 season.

During the course of these studies, Mr. Tom Walker of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab allowed us to inspect six color slides he made during May or June, 1976, of a single Plegadis individual on Cat Island. This bird is also clearly identifiable as a White-faced Ibis on the basis of the same characters mentioned above. This identification, coupled with Gaston's Glossy Ibis photograph (Gaston, 1976) confirms Cat Island during 1976 as the third known area of sympatry between P. chihi and P. falcinellus; Pratt (1976) lists Cameron Parish, Louisiana, and the Mississippi Delta as the other two. Whether Cat Island continues to be an area of sympatry or whether our lack of observation of Glossy Ibis indicates that they no longer breed on Cat Island is unknown. Studies during the 1978 breeding season will be directed toward the identification and behavioral relations between the two species.

Acknowledgments

The Birmingham and Mobile Bay (Alabama) Audubon Societies and the Dauphin Island Sea Lab are thanked for their generous support of this work. We are also extremely grateful to Mr. Tom Walker for the opportunity to view his excellent photographs of the 1976 bird.

Charles D. Duncan
Department of Chemistry
University of Alabama Birmingham
Birmingham, Alabama 35294

Paul G. Johnson
Dauphin Island Sea Lab
P. O. Box 386
Dauphin Island, Alabama 36528