

White-faced Ibis In Greene County

Species: White-faced ibis

Number: Two

Where: Snake Creek Marsh - 240 acre cattail marsh which is two miles north of Rippey in Greene County Iowa

When: April 23, 1986

Weather: Sunny with strong wind from southwest

At 6:15 P.M. I was walking north on the east edge of the marsh and noticed two large dark birds north of me about 300 yd. away. They were flying low and directly at me, and I first thought of cormorants. Ten power binoculars quickly proved this I.D. to be wrong. The birds veered slightly to my right and revealed both had long very decurved bills, long outstretched necks and long legs trailing behind. I knew immediately they were ibis and began running characteristics of white-faced and glossy ibis through my mind. The birds were flying into a strong wind from the southwest and seemed to take a long time to reach me. At about 30 yd. from me they turned to my left (west) and proceeded in front of me toward an open pool of water. It was this turning position that gave me the closest and best observation. The sun was bright from my left and fully illuminated the pair. My overall impression was of a bird maybe not as large as a cormorant - more bittern size - that was iridescent bronze-green on the back and breast and had a long (3 to 4 times head length) decurved bill. The back color reminded me of the neck color of a green-backed heron. The primaries were darker - more purple-green. These colors could be noted even before the birds reached their closest point. My attention was mainly directed to the head area where I noted that a white (prominent) outlining edged the facial area. This white line went from on top of the bill (where bill and head join) back behind the eye and then to the bottom of the bill under the chin. The bill seemed a little lighter in color than the head and body. I also noted that the legs and feet were about the color of the bronze feathers - maybe a little more reddish. Due to the short time period of this exposure, I did not note more marks.

The birds then flew away to the west and landed at the edge of an open pool. From time to time they would get up and move a little distance and land again. The birds were west of me now and were only silhouet^{ts} against the setting sun. I approached to within 50-60 yd. and attempted some photos but no color could be noted in the bad light.

My last sighting took place when the ibis flew up fairly high and I began taking silhouette photos against the sunset. At one point they flew in front of the sun as I was tracking and the extremely bright light through the 600 mm lens temporarily ended my viewing. After considerable blinking, I could not relocate the pair and I assume they dropped back into the marsh.

The birds were obviously ibis species. I believe they were white-faced ibis. Glossy ibis in spring may also show a faint whitish border to the facial area but it would not be as broad as in this case and would not extend behind the eye or under the chin as was the case in this sighting. The legs and feet would also not appear totally reddish in the glossy but would be gray with reddish joints.

Total observation time was about twenty minutes.

There have been approx. 25 or so reported ibis sightings in Iowa. Most of these are classified as ibis species as the report either lacked details to separate the two species in the spring or it was made in the fall when the two species are almost impossible to distinguish in the field. There are no accepted records of glossy ibis in Iowa. I observed two ibis at Otter Creek Marsh in Tama County several years ago but these were fall birds and consequently were left as ibis species.

This account was written the day after the sighting (April 24,1986).

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