

Joe Schaufenthal

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF  
AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

Species: Ibis of the genus Plegadis (Glossy or White-faced) Number: 6

Location: Sweet Marsh, which is located one mile East of Tripoli, Bremer Co.  
Iowa

Date: April 29, 1978 Time birds seen: 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM

Description: Size of the birds was less than that of a Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) but larger than a Green Heron (*Ardeola striata*). In flight the neck was extended and legs trailed. Wing shape was much like a Great Blue Heron. Tail was small and fan shaped. Bill was somewhat long and decurved. The color was a uniform dark brown, which in sunlight showed a green iridescence on wing coverts. Bill and legs were a greyish. At closest approach no white or red at base of bill could be detected.

Description of behavior: The ibis stayed in a group. They were first observed flying at a height of 100 feet or less, circling several times then settled down in an extensive tract of cattails. Attempt was made to stalk them but they flushed at a distance, circled again and alighted on another area of the marsh. The curious flight style was noted, leisurely flaps followed by a short glide. The speed of their flight appeared slower than a Great Blue Heron.

Habitat: The ibis settled down in a cattail marsh which covered several hundred acres. Apparently they preferred shallow water openings in the cattails. Sweet Marsh has a variety of habitats including open water, grassy marsh and cattail marsh.

Similar species: None of the herons or cranes has a curved beak, and none as far as I know exhibit the alternately flapping and gliding flight.

Distance: The ibis were seen mostly in flight with the closest approach being possibly less than 100 feet, this distance is an estimation.

Optical equipment: Bushnell custom 7 by 35 binoculars.

Light: At the time of closest observation, the light was at its best since the sun was one hour from setting. Sky had broken clouds, with the sun shining brightly. This first sighting had the birds in the West with sun in the N.W., the flight path of the ibis took them directly overhead as they moved Eastward. An excellent view was afforded when birds were overhead.

Previous experience: I am familiar with all commonly occurring herons, have seen Sandhill Cranes in Nebraska, but have never seen any of the ibis species outside of zoos.

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Ibis-continued

Other observers: On April 29 I observed the birds totally independently, but learned later that the same birds were observed by Larry Farmer of Westfield on the date of April 26, but did not document them. In a conversation with him he stated that he had an excellent look at the ibis within 75 feet in bright sunlight. He was nearly positive that the ibis were Glossy, a feeling shared by me. A search of Sweet Marsh on April 30 revealed no ibis.

Books consulted: Robbin's "Birds of North America", Peterson's "A Field Guide to the Birds", and Palmer's "Handbook".

A documentation of the sighting, was written on April 30 taken from notes written in the field on April 29. The documentation was rewritten on May 20 in light of the new information from other observers.

Date: May 30, 1978

Signature:

*Joe Schaferlund*

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