

A LETTER FROM ROGER TORY PETERSON

I have just read the article in the August issue of *Bird Observer* entitled "Range Expansion and New Breeding Record for the Glossy Ibis in Massachusetts" by Robert C. Humphrey. In his opening line Mr. Humphrey states that the purpose of his paper was twofold: "first to give a brief summary of the history of the Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) in North America and its northward expansion into Massachusetts, and second to report on a new breeding location in the state."

To quote Mr. Humphrey: "Audubon noted the 'first intimation' of this species in the United States as a bird shot in Maryland in 1817. By 1837 he referred to them as existing in vast numbers in Mexico and in flocks, but only as a summer resident in Texas."

Here is where I wish to set the record straight. Audubon knew the Glossy Ibis, but barely. He really encountered it only once, the male bird figured in his color plate, "procured in Florida near a woodcutter's cabin, a view of which is also given." He wrote: "The Glossy Ibis is of extremely rare occurrence in the United States, where it appears only at long and irregular intervals, like a wanderer who has lost its way." Then he added, "It exists in Mexico, however, in vast numbers. In the spring of 1837, I saw flocks of it in Texas."

What Audubon saw in Texas was not the Glossy Ibis, but its sister species the White-faced Ibis. Oberholser in his 2-volume work on the *Birds of Texas* lists the Glossy as hypothetical for that state, unsubstantiated by a specimen.

Prior to the mid-1930s when I was on the staff of the National Audubon Society, the largest known colony of the Glossy Ibis in the U. S. was 27 nests which had been under the watchful eye of Oscar Baynard, the warden at Orange Lake in Florida.

However, in 1936, Marvin Chandler, the Audubon warden on the Kissimmee, reported a very large colony in the marshes of Lake Okeechobee. Hundreds. Incredible. John Baker, then president of National Audubon, sent me down there to check on things. There were indeed hundreds; 1200 was the official estimate. In succeeding years the glossies of Okeechobee, often hundreds at a time, were enjoyed by the tour groups under the guidance of Alexander Sprunt (Sandy's father). That was undoubtedly the focal point from which the proliferating glossies moved rapidly up the coast forming colonies such as the dense one at Stone Harbor, New Jersey, and elsewhere. Eventually smaller colonies were established in New York State and in New England as far north as southern Maine.

Like the Cattle Egret, the Glossy Ibis appears to have been a very recent but highly successful immigrant from the Old World.

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Roger Tory Peterson, Old Lyme, Connecticut