

**FIRST STATE NESTING RECORD FOR WHITE-FACED  
IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) AND NESTING RANGE EXTENSION  
FOR TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)  
INTO WASHINGTON COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI**

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Observations of dark ibises on Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge (Yazoo Refuge), Washington County, began for me when a single dark ibis used the Cox Ponds in May, 1997 and also in 1998. In 1999, three dark ibises used the ponds from mid-September through October. Numbers were still low in 2001 (two birds), but jumped to a high of 134 birds in 2003. Numbers varied over the next seven years and peaked again at 130 in 2009. Some of these birds may have been Glossy Ibises (*Plegadis falcinellus*), as this species was identified there from time to time.

On 20 May 2009, I took two of our refuge office staff members by boat to view the wading bird rookery in Swan Lake, Yazoo Refuge. This rookery has been active for over 20 years and consistently hosts a wide variety of nesting birds including Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*), Great Egrets (*Ardea alba*), Little Blue Herons (*Egretta caerulea*), Snowy Egrets (*Egretta thula*), Tricolored Herons (*Egretta tricolor*), Black-crowned Night-Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Green Herons (*Butorides virescens*), Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), and Anhingas (*Anhinga anhinga*). In an area near the south end of the rookery, I saw a few White-faced Ibises (*Plegadis chihi*) in a stand of buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis* L.) that was isolated from the main rookery. As we approached the area I saw an adult White-faced Ibis on a nest (Figure 1) no more than two feet above the water in a low buttonbush at the edge of the stand. The bird left the nest with little provocation, so we paddled over and quickly inspected the nest which had three eggs in a relatively deep cup. The nest

was constructed of twigs much like those of other wading birds in the colony, but there was herbaceous vegetation also (mostly alligator weed, *Alternanthera philoxeroides*). Some of the vegetation was still green, having been recently added to the nest. Judging from the number of ibises in breeding plumage, other ibis nests were probably located in the same stand of buttonbush, which covered about one-half acre of the 40-acre rookery. We moved on to finish our tour of the rookery.



Figure 1. A White-faced Ibis nest from which the adult had just flown shows a deep cup and herbaceous vegetation in addition to twigs used in nest construction. David Linden, 20 May 2009.

On 26 May, I contacted wildlife photographer Michael Kelly about getting some photos of the ibis nests, especially after the young were hatched. We agreed to go in at a later date.

On 30 May, I again went into the rookery, this time with my step-son, Darren Bryant, in conjunction with distributing flea beetles (*Agasiciles hygrophila*) for alligator weed suppression. I took digital photographs of another White-faced Ibis nest containing one egg (Figure 2). This one was about five feet up in a brushy cypress tree (*Taxodium distichum*). The adult was very shy and did not stay near the nest when we approached.



Figure 2. White-faced Ibises use herbaceous vegetation as well as twigs to construct their nests, while other wading birds in this rookery use only twigs. This nest was in a brushy cypress tree about five feet off the water. David Linden, 30 May 2009.

To check on nesting progress, I returned to the rookery with a friend, Clyde Nichols, on 19 June. As we paddled toward the site, a flight of 30 dark ibises flew over our heads toward the rookery. A number of these appeared to be non-breeding birds, as were others I had seen at the Cox Ponds nearby, where they often feed. At the time of this visit, the eggs had still not hatched, but

the presence of several other White-faced Ibis nests was confirmed.

A single White-Faced Ibis nest was also discovered while doing a rookery survey 19 June 2009 in Beargarden Lake (Cope Impoundment) on Yazoo Refuge. The nest was also in buttonbush in the company of nesting Little Blue Herons and Snowy Egrets.

On 24 June 2009 Mike Kelly and I boated into the Swan Lake rookery. Mike took several photos of adult White-faced Ibises, clearly showing the red eye, white face extending behind the eye, pink facial skin, and pinkish legs of the adult in breeding condition (Figure 3), but still we did not see any hatchlings in the nests we checked.

As we were leaving the rookery, I pointed out a Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*) nest that I had previously discovered in a small cypress snag. This nest was south of the reported nesting range of the Tree Swallow, so I asked Mike to photograph it. Mike returned the following day to take better photos of both species. The original photo of Figure 4 shows a swallow with bluish-green iridescence on the head, dark blue iridescent back, and pure white under parts, bringing a beakful of insects to the nest. Figure 5 clearly shows two nestlings in the tree cavity.



Figure 3. An adult White-faced Ibis stands in the top of a buttonbush. Note the red eye with a band of white feathers behind it, pink skin between the eye and the beak, and pinkish legs. Michael A. Kelly/[www.wildexposures.net](http://www.wildexposures.net), 25 June 2009.



Figure 4. A Tree Swallow feeds its young a beakful of insects. Michael A. Kelly/www.wildexposures.net, 25 June 2009.



Figure 5. Two Tree Swallow nestlings await their next meal. Michael A. Kelly/[www.wildexposures.net](http://www.wildexposures.net), 25 June 2009.

We finally got some photos of young ibises (Figure 6) when wildlife photographer Jerry Litton visited the rookery on 24 July 2009.



Figure 6. A young White-faced Ibis stands in the top of a brushy cypress tree in the Swan Lake rookery. Jerry Litton, 24 July 2009.

In 2010, White-faced Ibises were still using the Swan Lake Rookery, where there were an estimated 30 nests. They also nested in buttonbush on the west side of Alligator Pond where four nests were observed while I was checking wood duck boxes in the lake. There were about a dozen Little Blue Heron nests in the same vicinity.