

## GLOSSY IBIS IN FLORIDA.

BY JOHN BONNER SEMPLE.

EMERGING from my one-man, mosquito-proof tent, after having been awakened by the loud call of a Sandhill Crane overhead, I was just in time to see the sun rise over the rim of the prairie in which the great marsh lies. Before me lay stretches of open water with patches of lily pads and other aquatic plants, and here and there beautiful little islands of pale green myrtle bushes and high saw-grass. Near at hand, walking about in the mud and seeming not to notice me at all, were half a dozen Limpkins, busily looking for clams and water-snails.

After a hurried breakfast, my companion and I set out on foot toward the middle of the marsh. Fortunately the distance we had to travel was only a few miles, as the walking was very bad. For long stretches it was necessary to feel with an advanced foot for a spot sufficiently firm to support one's weight; every opportunity was taken to step upon the roots of lilies and other water-plants, and even then there was the chance of breaking through to the waist. In some places as we advanced the whole surface of the bog would tremble and shake as if it were a mat of floating vegetation, none too thick. After a tiring walk, during which both of us broke through several times, we approached one of the small islands where a number of white birds could be seen, perched on the higher myrtle bushes. As we drew nearer, the birds began to take wing—Snowy Egrets, Louisiana Herons, and a few Anhingas; but thus far we had not seen the slightest sign of the particular birds for which we were looking. Not until we had come quite close did we see them. Then suddenly from near the center of the little island rose a band of beautiful Glossy Ibises. Circling overhead, with their lovely iridescent plumage glistening in the tropical sunlight, they were truly gorgeous to see. We counted them, as best we could, and made the number approximately fifty. But accurate counting was impossible, because of the two or three hundred birds of other species in the air with them. These were the Snowy Egrets and the Louisiana Herons,

together with a few White Ibises, and quite a number of Anhingas. The last, because of their dark color, made the counting of the Glossy Ibises most difficult. Going on into the rookery, we found nests of all the birds which have been named, excepting only the White Ibis. They do not seem to be popular with their dark cousins; the two never nest and rarely feed together. We counted thirty-five nests of the Glossy Ibis; some just being completed, others with one, two, or three beautiful dark green eggs. One nest contained four and another five eggs. The nests were all built in the saw-grass and were from two to five feet from the ground. Most of the Herons' and all of the Anhingas' nests were in myrtle bushes. The Glossy Ibis nests were rather large, fairly well cupped, and constructed of dried saw-grass and deer's-tongue, with a few pieces of green water-fern or green saw-grass in the lining. In some a few myrtle sticks were used near the bottom. The outer edges of the nests were dabbed with white marl from the feet of the birds. One nest was of substantial construction; it measured a foot and a half from top to bottom. All the others seemed to have been hurriedly built. We learned that this ibis colony had begun to nest on a similar island about two miles distant, but had scarcely finished building when their rookery was burned out by careless "gator" hunters. It was not difficult to distinguish both the nests and the eggs of the Ibis from those of the Herons and Anhingas, among which they were nesting.

Our stay in the rookery was brief and we kept a sharp lookout for crows, which are always ready to rush in for eggs or young birds before the parents return. After walking away a few hundred yards we sat down and again attempted, though without success, to make an accurate count of the Glossy Ibises as they returned. But, taking our approximate count of fifty, and allowing for, say, twenty birds off feeding in the marsh, and considering the number of nests, an estimate of seventy birds in this colony seems conservative.

An old plume hunter told us that some years ago this colony of Glossy Ibises numbered only about a dozen pairs.

With the feeling of being well repaid for our labor, we plodded slowly back to camp, the last mile being made in very poor time. Grateful indeed were we for the cool evening after the fierce sun

had set, when we could sit and look out over the prairie and marsh. Sandhill Cranes were at play out on the "burn"; an Everglade Kite flew slowly by, looking for water-snails. Just before turning in for the night, a flock of thirty-five Sandhill Cranes passed high over head, closing the day with the same weird call with which it was begun.

The region in which this rookery lies is Central Florida, and the date of the visit was April 25, 1932.

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