

First breeding record of the White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) in Virginia

by Paula C. Frohring and
Ruth A. Beck

THE WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*) is listed as a regular breeding bird on the Atlantic coast from Florida to South Carolina with post-nesting dispersal by immatures into North Carolina (Palmer, 1962. Handbook of North American Birds, I. New Haven, p. 525). Since 1962 a breeding population has been established in North Carolina. The influx of 2000 immatures into Battery Island Rookery, Southport, North Carolina in 1968 was considered indicative of northward expansion by the species (*Audubon Field Notes* 22:597-599). Adults eventually established in this heronry, and by 1977, 1500 pairs of White Ibis nested in the Battery Island Rookery (Parnell, pers. comm.). At Alligator Bay, North Carolina in 1969, 133 juveniles roosted (*Chat* 1971. 35:7). Although adults have not nested this far north in North Carolina, it is notable that in 1970 a small group of adults wintered in the Lower Newport River area near Morehead City. This population remained the following winter (*Chat* 1971. 35-80), and doubled in number to 100 residents by the winter of 1972-1973 (*Chat* 1973. 37:52). Fifty pairs of White Ibis nested near Morehead City during the 1977 breeding season (Parnell, pers. comm.). Individual adults were reported in the winters of 1974-1975 (*Chat* 1975. 39:9, 95), 1975-1976 (*Chat* 1976. 40:35), and through the fall until December 30 on Pea-Bodie Island National Wildlife Refuge, North Carolina (*Chat* 1977. 41:37). Although several adults were present in the Pea Island heronry in the 1977 nesting season, no White Ibis nests were found (Parnell, pers. comm.).

POST-NESTING DISPERSAL by immature White Ibis was exceptional in 1968, for juveniles were sighted as far north as Far Hills, Somerset County, New Jersey (*Raven* 1968. 39:28-29). During that summer a flock of 30 immatures was reported at Back Bay National Wildlife

Refuge, and several flocks totaling over 100 juveniles were sighted at Smith Lake, Norfolk County, Virginia (*Raven* 1970. 42:38). Since 1968 immature White Ibises have been reported sporadically in Virginia. In 1970 small numbers of juveniles appeared in seven different locations throughout the state (*Raven* 1970. 42:38). A few sightings occurred in 1972 (*Raven* 1972. 44:79), and in 1973 (*Raven* 1974 45:75). All 1976 reports cited individual immature birds (*American Birds* 1977. 30:47, 826, 939). The largest flock of immatures in Virginia since 1968 was seen by R. Waterfield at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge on June 22, 1977. Over half of the 20 sub-adults first seen on the refuge remained through July 20 (John Schroer, pers. comm.).

During the 1977 breeding season adult White Ibises were reported in three locations in Virginia. A pair of adults was seen in a flock of seven Glossy Ibises near Shelly Bay, Chincoteague, Virginia by R. N. Williams. Bill Williams observed an adult in the heronry on Hog Island, Northhampton County, Virginia, and reported that he, William Akers, and Tom Wiebolt had seen two White Ibis adults in the Fishermans Island heronry. The latter sighting followed a series of observations on Fishermans Island Wildlife Refuge (37°6'N, 75°58'W). Doctor and Mrs. Greg Capelli and Dan Engstrom reported an adult White Ibis on the refuge on May 5. Mitchell Byrd, Thomas Stock and the first author again observed one adult in breeding plumage there on May 8. Byrd alerted observers of previous White Ibis movements and of a possible first nesting record in Virginia. The first author recorded five more sightings in May, and four observations in June. On May 17 three adults were first seen within the heronry. Two adults were observed on May 21 standing in the tall *Spartina alterniflora* zone of a marsh on the refuge. The pair flew up, called, and circled low overhead sev-

eral times. On four occasions a single White Ibis flew into the same vicinity of the heron colony as noted on May 8.

THE FISHERMANS ISLAND heronry is located in a five-acre stand, comprised of Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*), Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), and American Holly (*Ilex opaca*) which abruptly changes to Wax Myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*). The taller cherry stand is densely populated by Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) nesting from 4.5 to 6 m high. Three small groups of Great Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*) also nest in this area. The denser Wax Myrtle stand contains Black-crowned Night Herons at the higher elevations, with Snowy Egrets (*Egretta thula*), Louisiana Herons (*Hydranassa tricolor*), and Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus falcinellus*) nesting from 2 to 4 m. Little Blue Herons (*Florida caerulea*) nest at a similar height but as a more homogeneous group in a more open section of the Wax Myrtle stand. In 1976, Cattle Egrets (*Bulbulcus ibis*) reoccupied other species' nests adjacent to, and among the Little Blue Herons. In 1977, the majority of the Cattle Egret population reoccupied nests apart from the Little Blue Herons. Hatching dates for the Cattle Egrets coincide with the third or fourth peak for other species (early July), and continue until mid-September. It was during this latter hatching period that the coauthors found the first White Ibis nest reported in Virginia on July 10, 1977. The nest was located in a mature Wax Myrtle at the sharp transition zone between cherry and Wax Myrtle near the center of the heronry.

THE NEST WAS DISTINCTIVELY LARGE, relative to surrounding ones, situated in the fork of Wax Myrtle branches at approximately

4 m above the ground. We found two ten-day-old chicks in the nest. Their solid black heads, sheathed white feathers on the backs, rumps and chests, and vocalizations distinguished them from neighboring Glossy Ibis nestlings. During our observation, both parents vocalized from perches above us. The more active parent called and moved from branch to branch, often standing in clear view. The discoloration of this bird's neck and back indicated that it had young begging for food (James Kushlan, pers.

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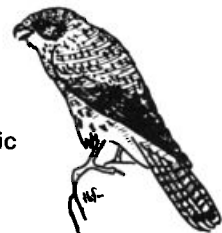
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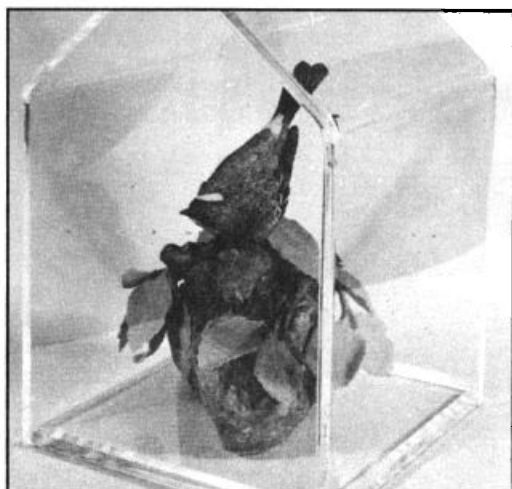
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comm.). After we moved to an observation point 6 m from the site, the active parent approached the nest, exchanging calls with the older chick. We revisited the nest the following day and on July 13 both chicks were measured and banded with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bands 806-39145 and 806-39146.

This record constitutes a northward extension of the breeding range of the species of approximately 150 nautical miles.

—*Department of Biology, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia 23185.*



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Communications

To the editor:

In the article on the Newburyport, Mass., Ross' Gull by Miliotis and Buckley (*AB* 29:643-646, 1975), the bird was incorrectly referred to as "the first Ross' Gull ever recorded in North America away from Arctic waters." This error was repeated in the account of the December 1976 bird shot in Newfoundland (*AB* 31:307). Although not well known, there is a previous record of Ross' Gull from Victoria, British Columbia: on Nov. 9, 1966, an immature Ross' was photographed by Ralph Fryer at Victoria's Clover Point. An excellent photograph of this bird was published in *Syesis* 4:218, 1971 (Journal of the British Columbia Provincial Museum). Thus the species should be watched for on the Pacific coast as well.

—Wayne C. Weber, Department of Zoology,
Mississippi St., Univ.,
Mississippi State, MS 39762.
[Similarly from Spencer G. Sealy,
Univ. of Manitoba, Winnipeg, R3T 2N2.]

To the editor:

The Changing Seasons for September, 1977, was a wonderful job. However, the account of the Gray-breasted Martin (*AB* 31:971) in Florida, as representing the first record in the United States, is in error. In the Checklist of the Birds of Texas and Oberholser's Bird Life of Texas (1974), you will find accounts of both specimens and nesting records for this species for Texas. Also, there are many unsubstan-

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