



A juvenile White Ibis may present a bit of an identification problem



Juvenile Glossy Ibises compared to their cousins have no white under parts

Brunswick Wildlife Battery Island's Ibises

By late spring Southport's avian celebrity, the White Ibis returns to Battery Island to nest. Throughout the summer, you may watch the thousands that stream back and forth across the river in small foraging flocks.

The White Ibis pictured above is a member of the class of 2008, a young juvenile whose plumage will become lighter brown by this fall and then molt into its white, definitive plumage by fall of 2009.

Lost in the crowd is the other ibis...the Glossy Ibis. Less than ten Glossy Ibis nests were recently reported. I usually see a small flock of Glossy Ibises flying between Fort Fisher and Southport several times a year. The photo is of a juvenile taken in Zeke's Island National Estuarine Research Reserve near the ferry.

Battery Island is the anchor of Audubon's Cape Fear River Islands Important Birding Area (IBA) that stretches north past the ferry and also includes Striking, South Pelican, Ferry Slip, and North Pelican Islands.

The island supports the largest breeding colony of wading birds in the state, including approximately ten percent of North America's White Ibises. White Ibises were first reported nesting here in the 1940's and by 1956 there were fifteen nests. According to Walker Golder, Deputy Director of Audubon North Carolina, this year's estimate is 14,500 breeding pairs.

Also, the five IBA islands support vibrant breeding grounds for beach nesting birds such as gulls, terns, oystercatchers, and pelicans.

Why is Battery Island for the birds? Habitat! Wading birds nest in red cedars, yaupon, and other shrubs on the higher, southern end of the island. The island is protected by the strong currents of the Cape Fear River from mammalian predators such as raccoons and foxes and Audubon enforces a year-round ban on human activity.

The island is located close to freshwater wetlands that provide crustaceans for ibis nestlings that cannot tolerate salty marine prey like adults. So a parent may switch from fiddler crabs to freshwater crayfish and insects to regurgitate into the mouths of their babes. Hopefully you are not reading this over dinner.

Like the White Ibis, the Glossy is a wading bird with a long, decurved bill for tactile foraging, probing the muck for crustaceans. Insects are also an important dietary source. Its beautiful adult plumage is metallic bronze, with green iridescent highlights, especially noticeable on flight feathers in bright light.

No way is the Glossy the “Rodney Dangerfield” of wading birds. It is respected as the most widespread species of ibis worldwide, having populations from Maine to Central and South America to southern Europe, Africa, Madagascar, India, Indonesia, and Australia.

Though greatly outnumbered by White Ibises on the east coast, the Glossy Ibis has vastly expanded their range over the past century into North America going from rare and local in Florida to locally common breeders as far north as Maine.

Both ibises may be found on our coast year round...including small numbers in winter. After breeding, they disperse widely and may travel long distances to our north, followed by a migration by most birds to the south to their wintering grounds in Florida, the Gulf Coast, and beyond.

So the show goes on. As you enjoy the large number of ibises overhead look for the “other ibis”. The Glossy should be sought as a rarity. Family and friends visiting from out of town, whether or not they are birders, will appreciate watching the show, especially if the Glossy becomes an addition to their life bird list.

To honor our ibises, the City of Southport and the Cape Fear Audubon Society are planning a birding festival for May 13-16, 2009. The ibises, other waders, and beach nesting birds will be the headliners. Many land birds returning to breed will be side shows and our avian eye-candy, the Painted Bunting, will be dessert.

The festival will feature field trips to sites such as Battery Island (by boat), Bald Head Island, Fort Fisher, and Brunswick Town. Salt marsh and black water kayak tours will also be offered. Possibilities for workshops on growing herbs and native plants; wildlife photography and nature writing; and bird identification basics are being explored.

John Ennis

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**A second-year juvenile White Ibis
from the Class of 2007**



Another juvenile enjoyed the ibis show on the Solomon T