

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

This resource can be cited as:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2003, January 6. Florida's breeding bird atlas: A collaborative study of Florida's birdlife. <http://www.myfwc.com/bba/> (Date accessed mm/dd/yyyy).

White Ibis *Eudocimus albus*

To many people, the White Ibis is a symbol of Florida, and its habit of nesting and flocking in large numbers dramatically conveys an abundance of wildlife. This bird resides and breeds from Baja California and Sinaloa, through south Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, and coastal North Carolina, and then south to Peru, the Greater Antilles, and French Guiana. Many now believe the White Ibis to be a color-race of the Scarlet Ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*) because the 2 forms interbreed in the wild.

Habitat. White Ibises feed primarily on aquatic prey, including crayfish, crabs, insects, snakes, anurans, and fish. They usually breed in mixed-species colonies located over standing water, within freshwater marshes or ponds, or on coastal islands. Nesting occurs in trees, shrubs, cactus, and grass clumps, from ground level to a height of 15 m (50 ft). The nests are round in shape and constructed of sticks, bent rushes, leaves, and roots. Clutches are 1 to 4 (usually 2 or 3) cream-to-greenish-colored eggs, speckled with brown, black, and reddish spots. Incubation requires 21 to 22 days, and the young are able to leave the nest at 9 to 16 days of age.

Independence from parents, however, does not occur until 40 to 50 days of age.

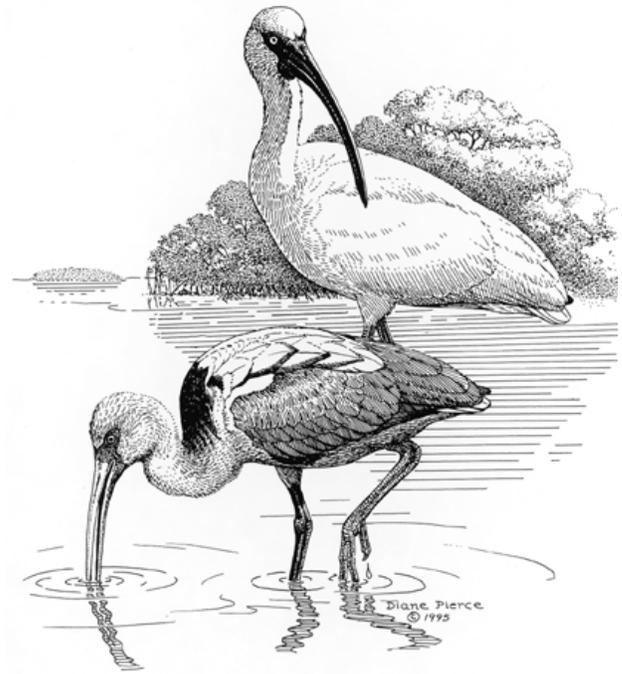


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Seasonal Occurrence. Nesting typically extends from March to August; however, historical records extend this from February through October. In winter, the White Ibis is generally rare or absent in the Panhandle. Spring and fall migration flights, generally in February and September-October, can be spectacular events. This species wanders widely and is nearly nomadic in breeding habits. After the breeding season, adults and juveniles may travel northward well outside of the breeding range.

Status. Although now greatly outnumbered by the *Cattle Egret*, the White Ibis remains a numerous wading bird in Florida. Nevertheless, aerial surveys have revealed 90% declines in south Florida breeding pairs since the 1940s and 20 to 50% declines statewide during the past decade (Kushlan 1978; Runde et al. 1991). In the period from 1976 to 1978, Nesbitt et al. (1982) reported more than 180,000 birds breeding in Florida, while Runde et al. (1991) reported only 65,000 between 1986 and 1989. Because of this, the White Ibis was designated a Species of Special Concern by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission [editor: now Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission] (Kushlan 1978). The causes of the decline are likely to be similar as those for other waders; loss and degradation of wetland habitat and human development in coastal areas and freshwater foraging areas. In addition, large numbers of this nomadic species appear to have been attracted to the intensive crayfish aquaculture industry of south central and southwest Louisiana. It has been recorded breeding throughout the state, although it is known for dramatic shifts in its breeding locations and highly variable breeding site fidelity (Ogden 1978a). Within Florida, the center of breeding abundance has historically been the Everglades.

Breeding colonies are often quite large (up to many thousands of nests). They are conspicuous from the air, as the flight-lines of incoming and outgoing adults are easily observed from the ground. With a few notable exceptions, White Ibises tend to nest in relatively isolated areas, well away from human habitation, and close to

a large wetland. While breeding is conspicuous, it is also very concentrated, and the locations are difficult to predict. This increases the chance of overlooking some breeding colonies. Colonies are most numerous in central and southern Florida, with much smaller numbers in north-central and Panhandle counties.

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Sponsored by Dr. and Mrs. Arthur J. Stevenson

White Ibis

