





093-01-1995

## **White Ibis - *Eudocimus albus***

State Game Lands #169  
Cumberland County, PA

August 24 - September 9, 1995

Pond # 1 at State Games Lands #169, between Newville and Newburg in western Cumberland County, has served as a late summer roosting location for Great Egrets and other long-legged waders for a number of years. On three previous occasions I have found immature Little Blue Herons there, presumably post-breeding wanderers. The previous high count at that sight for Great Egrets was 26 on September 5, 1994, however something occurred in the summer of 1995 to cause unprecedented numbers of waders to gather at this roosting spot. Whether the large gathering was drought related or not I can't be sure. The Conodoguinet Creek borders the state game lands and it's drought driven low level may have provided unusually abundant feeding habitat for the egrets. Usually, I visit the area during the last few days of July and beginning of August. For various reasons, I didn't visit the sight this year until Tuesday, August 15th at 7:00 p.m., when I counted 65 Great Egrets along with 7 Great Blue Herons, 1 immature Little Blue Heron, 4 Green Herons and 16 Black-crowned Night-herons.

A few days later, Monday August 21st at 6:30 pm, 2 miles away at the Big Spring Fish and Game Association's restored wetland area, my wife, Robyn and I discovered an immature Tricolored Heron. This was our first sighting of Tricolored Heron in Cumberland County and only our second one in Pennsylvania. We notified some of our birding friends whom we thought would be interested in seeing this species in Cumberland County. I saw the Tricolored Heron again the next morning at Big Spring Fish and Game, but it got nervous and flew off when one of the club members began target shooting at their shooting range. Dick Colyer came out to look for it that evening, but didn't find it. I told him about the egret roost at the state game lands and that I thought there was a possibility that the Tricolored could find its way to the roost.

Dick checked at the game lands the next evening, didn't find the heron, but did report a Snowy Egret there. I went back over to the game lands pond on Thursday evening the 24th and found the Tricolored Heron sitting on dead log at the edge of the pond when I arrived about 7:15 p.m. As I was watching the heron through my scope, I noticed another dark wader below it, moving behind some fallen dead logs. Finally, it popped it's head up and I saw it's long decurved bill and realized immediately that I was looking at an immature White Ibis. It was too late in the evening to notify anyone in time for them to get out there before the sun set, so I just enjoyed watching the birds for a while. Eventually both the heron and the ibis flew up from the waters edge and joined the egrets that were already at roost. I counted over 60 Great Egrets again that evening as well as 6 Great Blue Herons, 10 Black-crowned Night-Herons and 2 immature Little Blue Herons.

At least one immature White Ibis was seen each evening from August 24th through September 9th. On Friday evening September 1st, while 8 of us were watching the first White Ibis foraging along the pond's edge, Cliff Jones spotted a second bird circling overhead. The second ibis eventually joined the first one at the water's edge and after a few uneasy minutes of checking each other out, they settled down and became buddies. The next 5 evenings (through Sept, 6th) the two ibises were

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observed flying into the roosting pond together. On the evening of September 7th only one ibis arrived at the roost and that single bird was last reported on September 9th.

Pond #1 in State Game Lands 169 is used primarily as a roosting location for the egrets and herons. On most days during this time period, the pond was virtually void of any waders. Sometimes 2 or 3 Great Egrets were there and on a few occasions I saw one or both of the immature Little Blue Herons there in the middle of the day. Typically, I would arrive at the pond in early evening (5:30 - 6:00) and there would be just a few egrets present. In the two hours or so before sunset the egrets would begin arriving at the pond, sometimes in ones or twos, other times in groups as large as 20 or more. Most of the birds would arrive in the last half hour before sunset and they would come in from all directions. Although some of the birds would land in the pond itself and seemed to be searching for that last minute bite before bed, most of them flew directly into the roost trees.

After the first few evenings I started using a clicker to get a more accurate count of the egrets as they came into the pond for the night. This highest count was 89 Great Egrets on Friday, September 8th. By September 26th the number had dwindled to 35 Great Egrets and on the evening of October 13th no egrets were seen at Pond #1.

On some occasions the single White Ibis was present at the pond when I arrived, however after the two birds hooked up, on the five nights that they came in together, their arrival was after 7:30 p.m. On a few of those nights, they both flew directly into the roost trees. At least one of them would remain out in the open, preening its feathers for a while, so everyone who came out to see them got a good look. The Tricolored Heron was not always quite as cooperative. Like the single ibis, on some evenings the heron was present when I arrived, but other nights it would not be seen flying in until just before dark and then it would immediately disappear into the roost tree. On a few evenings the Tricolored Heron was not seen at all. The last sighting of the Tricolored Heron occurred on Wednesday, September 6th.

I only received one report of a sighting of the ibises during the daytime. On Thursday, August 31st, Frances Freet reported seeing an ibis on the dike between ponds #7 and #8 along Bridgewater Road at around 10:00 a.m. I searched that area on other days but did not find the ibises there. However, in a later conversation with Cumberland County's Wildlife Conservation Officer, Jim Binder, I learned that he had observed the 2 ibises feeding in the Conodoguinet Creek not very far from those ponds on two or three occasions during their stay.

I counted 63 birders who visited the sight during the 17 day period that the ibises were seen. Most of these birders were from the local area - Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin and York counties, but a few folks came from as far away as Bucks and Delaware counties to add the species to their Pennsylvania state lists. All 63 saw at least one ibis and all but a few saw the Tricolored Heron. It was quite an enjoyable experience for me to share the sighting of these birds with so many other appreciative viewers.

Notes written immediately after the initial observation on August 24th:

The ibis was seen down low in a stand of dead tree snags and fallen logs, often disappearing for several minutes behind the logs. It was in the company of Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, 2

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immature Little Blue Herons, 1 Tricolored Heron and Black-crowned Night-Herons. While the herons and egrets were sitting still up on the logs watching for prey to pass underneath, the ibis seemed to be actively probing about in search of food items. Because the logs blocked my view, I couldn't tell if it was probing in the water or in the mud at the water's edge. Just before sunset the ibis flew up to a group of trees at the water's edge where most of the Great Egrets had retreated. It began preening, apparently preparing to roost there for the night.

The ibis was seen in close proximity of the Tricolored Heron and the Little Blue Herons. In fact at one point all four of those birds were visible in one scope field. The ibis was approximately the same size as these smaller herons. It was a long-legged wading bird with a long neck and decurved bill which was pale-pinkish in color. The skin around the eye was pinkish-red. The head and neck feathers were dusky gray. The back and wings were a dark charcoal gray in color. The underparts including the underwing coverts were white. The underside of the flight feathers were dark showing a sharp contrast from underneath when the bird flashed its wings. The legs were not seen well, but appeared to be light colored, perhaps flesh toned.

These observations were made through a Kowa TSN-2 spotting scope in the failing evening light. I have observed immature White Ibises in southern Florida and I also observed an immature of this species at Marsh Creek State Park in Chester County, PA in August of 1993.

#### Discussion:

White Ibis is a casual post breeding wanderer to Pennsylvania in late summer/early fall and accidental in the spring. According to the Annotated list of the Birds of Pennsylvania, numbers of sightings are "increasing" in the state and almost all records are of immatures. There is at least one record of an adult in the spring from western PA. A perusal of *Pennsylvania Birds* back issues revealed 11 records of White Ibis in the state since the first issue was published in 1987. With the exception of the spring sighting of an adult, all of these recent sightings have occurred between July 31 and September 16.

I have learned of at least two previous sightings of White Ibis in Cumberland County. A group of 7 immatures that spent a few days along the Susquehanna River, was seen at the mouth of the Conodoguinet Creek in West Fairview in August 1984 (Deuane Hoffman, pers. com.) and another group of 3 immatures was observed in State Game Lands #169 in the summer of either 1988 or 1989 (Jim Binder, pers. com.).

Don Henise

763 Green Spring Road  
Newville, PA 17241

717-776-6550  
email - deheni@ark.ship.edu

#### References:

- Pennsylvania Birds*. 1987-1995. Narvon, Pa.  
Santner, S. 1991. Summary of the Distribution of Ibises in Pennsylvania. *Pennsylvania Birds* 5:150  
Santner, S. J., D.W. Brauning, G. Schwalbe, P.W. Schwalbe. 1992. *Annotated list of the Birds of Pennsylvania*.

Record No.: 093-01-1995

# Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

## Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*)

Date of Sighting: 24 August 1995 to 9 September 1995

Location: SGL # 169

County: CUMBERLAND

Observer(s): Don Henise

Date of Submission: 1995

Submitted by: Don Henise

Written Description: YES Photo: YES Specimen: NO

Recording: NONE

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V			Abstain
					A	B	C	
F. Haas	X							
N. Pulcinella	X							
E. Kwater	X							
R. Ickes	X							
G. McWilliams	X							
P. Schwalbe	X							
S. Feldstein	X		<del>XXXX</del>					
TOTALS	7							
DECISION	X							

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

F. C. Haas

Date:

5-1-96