

Species: Glossy Ibis  
(Vernacular name)

Plegadis falcinellus  
(Scientific name)

If you watch birds solely for your own enjoyment, a written description of your observations is unnecessary. But, if you have seen something unusual, and would like to share this with others, a written description is essential. Compilers of regional bird lists must insist that their records be scientifically sound; future bird students--those studying occurrences 50 years from now--must have a written record on which to depend. By providing the verifying written description, you are employing a basic rule of the scientific method.

We recognize that experienced field observers can provide important and reliable records, if supported by an adequate verifying description. Thus this request is an effort to perpetuate your record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for examination by others in the future. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation, irrespective of the observer.

Date (s): 27 March 1986 Time Bird Seen: 8:30 a.m. to 9:15 a.m.  
again at 10:50-11:20 a.m.

Locality: Sweitzer Lake  
Delta, Colo.  
Nearest town, county and state:

Optical equipment: Nikon 9x30 binocs. ; Mostly B&L. Discoverer Scope X60.

If photographed, please enclose copy. Equipment used: Minolta 107 35 mm + 200 mm telephoto  
Photos probably not helpful. All are in flight, at distance

Number of birds seen: 1 Sex: — Plumage: Adult breeding

Light conditions: Excellent. Sun just rising, at my back, bright & clear; beautiful morning

Distance from bird, and how measured: 55 yds (paced off next day)

Describe the bird's overall behavior: Bird was perched on a partly submerged dead snag that had blown into the water at lake's edge. I + was with two White-faced Ibis; all perched just out of water. The birds stood still in the morning sun but often preened, turning this way and that; tilting bill up to sky. Sometimes shifted position on perch or took a step. Once the birds drank lake water by dipping bill nearly all the way in and tilting head back to swallow. Later, when startled, birds flew together!

Describe the habitat in which you observed the bird: Lake edge

Other observers who independently identified this bird (Please list name and address):

VICKY JANOS

Include size, overall shape, plumage and color pattern; details on shape or size of bill, wings, and tail. (Reference to its resemblance to field guide descriptions is not enough.) Describe what you actually saw in the field. Bird was a dark chicken-sized or coot sized bird with long legs and long (about 7") decurved bill. I guessed bird was 23" long (16" body + 7" bill). Head, neck, breast, back and wing coverts were a clean, deep chestnut-maroon color - unspeckled and unstreaked. Top of head and area on side of head showed a greenish gloss or sheen when head turned just so. Lower back and wings were a glossy or "greasy" green with a spindly pink sheen in some lights, especially on greater wing coverts & flight feathers. Tail was as short as folded wing, and dark. Legs were long with knobly "knee" and "ankle" joints. Four toes were long and grasping. Legs and toes were grayish with a slight pinkish tinge - joints were not brighter than rest of legs - but legs were not at all like bright ~~gray~~ red of W-f Ibis. Bill was gray with a weak pinkish suffusion - about like color of W-f Ibis' bill. At all angles, in all lights, at all times iris was dark brown. The W-f Ibis eyes in similar light were bright red - they could appear brown for a moment but would then look red again. The Glossy Ibis always had brown iris. Facial skin was even medium gray with absolutely no tinge of pink (Neighboring W-f Ibis facial skin was bright pinkish-red) This gray facial skin was contrasted to pinkish tinge of bill. White around face was one half to less extent as W-f Ibis. I was confined to a neat sharp border, crisp and clean (compared to W-f Ibis broad, diffuse white border). White did not encircle eye but reached just to top edge of eye. Then

Describe the bird's calls or sounds, if heard; including method of delivery - i.e., from perch, in flight, etc.: Twice, the ibis in question called. It was a low, rough croak; not loud, falling sl. in pitch at the end - kind of a mournful croak.

List similar species and how you eliminated them: I was able to compare this bird to two adult W-faced Ibis in breeding plumage. Often had both birds in scope at once. At 60x the ibis in question would not fit in field of view.

Bill color: Identical pinkish-gray but Glossy Ibis bill had yellowish tinge at a distance in good light and W-f Ibis did not. At close range in scope neither's bill looked yellowish.

Leg color: This bird had much grayer legs. W-f Ibis legs were boldly maroon.

Facial skin: Even, dark gray in this bird. Was bright pink in W-f Ibis.

Eye color: Iris was brown in this bird; blood red in W-f Ibis. This was true in all lights. While W-f Ibis iris could look brown at certain angles, this bird's iris was always brown.

White border: Restricted, narrow (almost a neat line as if painted by a fine brush).

Prior experience with this and similar species: Did not extend behind eye nor under chin. W-f Ibis had broad white border, diffusely grading into chestnut head, rimmed eye & extended under chin too. The "character" of white border was totally different than W-f. Ibis

Much w/ W-f Ibis in all plum. I saw Glossy Ibis in Florida May 1983.

This report was written from notes made during X after      observation; from memory     

NAME (print): MARK JANOS

Mailing address: 860 Shayer Cir. Delta, Colo.

Signature: Mark Janos

Return to:  
Hugh E. Kingery  
869 Milwaukee Street  
Denver, Colorado 80206

border ~ 12mm deep sharp even border. No white above, below, or behind eye.

picked up again below eye & extended to bottom corner of bill at edge of chin where it stopped.



"GLOSSY" IBIS



"WHITE-FACED" IBIS

Facial border broadly white (~5mm) diffuse edge and goes all the way around & behind eye.

APPENDIX II

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD SIGHTINGS  
FOR  
THE COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS' RECORDS

Species: Glossy Ibis ; Plegadis falcinellus  
(Vernacular name) (Scientific name)

If you watch birds solely for your own enjoyment, a written description of your observations is unnecessary. But, if you have seen something unusual, and would like to share this with others, a written description is essential. Compilers of regional bird lists must insist that their records be scientifically sound; future bird students -- those studying occurrences 50 years from now -- must have a written record on which to depend. By providing the verifying written description, you are employing a basic rule of the scientific method.

We recognize that experienced field observers can provide important and reliable records, if supported by an adequate verifying description. Thus this request is an effort to perpetuate your record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for examination by others in the future. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation, irrespective of the observer.

Dates (s): 3-27-86 Time Bird Seen: 8<sup>30</sup> A to 9<sup>00</sup> A

Locality: Switzer Lake  
Delta, CO  
Nearest town, county and state:

Optical equipment: Scope x 60 power

If photographed, please enclose copy. Equipment used: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of birds seen: 1 Sex: - Plumage: Adult breeding

Light conditions: sun behind me, clear day

Distance from bird, and how measured: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the bird's overall behavior:

bird was perched on a dead branch, looking around, occas. preening

Describe the habitat in which you observed the bird:

edge of Switzer Lake

Other observers who independently identified this bird (Please list name and address):

Mark Juro 860 Niagara Circle Delta, CO 81416

APPENDIX 11 Continued

Describe in great detail the bird which you saw. Emphasize particularly the field marks used to identify the bird, but include a complete description of the bird. Include size, overall shape, plumage and color pattern; details on shape or size of bill, wings, and tail. (Reference to its resemblance to field guide descriptions is not enough). Describe what you actually saw in the field.

The bird was large body - mallard size with long gray legs and large joints. It has brown purple feather with green edges to <sup>feathers</sup> wings when shown in sun. The bill was long, <sup>hook</sup> curved - gray. It had brown eyes and skin around face was gray. A white area encircled face but not eyes - about half above eyes - it was a clean white line.

Describe the bird's calls or sounds, if heard; including method of delivery-- i.e., from perch, in flight, etc.:

I did not hear the bird's call.

List similar species and how you eliminated them:

White-faced Ibis - WFI - has red eyes, pink legs, a white border around its face in eye, facial skin is pink.

Glossy Ibis - has brown eyes, gray legs, a white border that is well defined around face and eye, facial skin - gray.

Prior experience with this and similar species:

I've seen WFI before in Colo but I've never seen a Glossy Ibis.

This report was written from notes made during \_\_\_\_\_ after  observation; from memory .

Name (print) : VICKY JANOS

Mailing address: 860 Sharpe Cr Delta, Co 81416

Signature: Vicky Janos

Return Form To:

CFO Records Committee  
c/o Curator--Zoological Collections  
Denver Museum of Natural History  
City Park  
Denver, CO 80205

27 March 1986

Dear Peter,

I want to include a note with this report. I am just as skeptical as the next guy about a Glossy Ibis report, maybe even more so. When I judged Jerry Cairo's Glossy Ibis report last spring I mentioned that perhaps a specimen would be required in this case. Now I'm not so sure! (When you see the rarity instead of the next guy it makes you a believer!)

Concerning the sighting itself: I had an excellent, long study of the bird in perfect light. I watched it for 45 minutes but could have gone longer. I was so close, at 60X, that it was like holding the bird at arm's length. I was very lucky to be able to compare the ibis in question with two clearly-marked White-faced Ibis's. It was by looking back & forth repeatedly that my wife & I became convinced that two different species stood in front of us.

Let me put it this way: Why isn't this a Glossy Ibis? I spoke to Jerry Cairo on the phone today concerning his bird and it sounds just like this bird today. He communicated with Bruce Peterjohn (Reg. Ed. Am Birds Middlewestern Prairie) who told him that his birds (& therefore mine) were totally consistent with breeding-plumaged glossy ibis. Apparently the gray facial skin (rather than blue) is expected when away from breeding grounds & presence of females.

I have one lingering doubt: Is there a plumage of White-faced Ibis (first spring male; female; winter plumage partly molted into breeding plumage, or?) that can mimic so exactly a breeding-plumaged Glossy Ibis? I don't know the answer to this for sure, but I strongly suspect ~~that~~ there is not.

I guess this is another tough question for records committee and I look forward to some debate on the subject.

Yours,

Mark

Is it O.K. to send these reports directly to you.



7-86-10  
A

*Museum of Natural Science*  
*Research Division: Museum of Zoology*  
LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL COLLEGE  
BATON ROUGE · LOUISIANA · 70803-3216  
504/388-2855

28 September 1986

Mr. Peter Gent  
55 S. 35th St.  
Boulder, Colo. 80303

Dear Peter:

Sorry that it's taken a while to respond to the Glossy Ibis records -- I spent the summer in Amazonian Bolivia and am still trying to catch up on correspondence.

The record by Mark and Vicky Janos seems unquestionable. They were obviously aware of important field marks and were lucky enough to have White-faced Ibis for direct comparison. They were cautious about determining the true iris color. They noted all the diagnostic marks in great detail over a considerable time span at relatively close range. What more can you ask for? A photo would have been nice, but if you're going to accept a sight record, I think that you have to accept this one.

As for Jerry Cairo's record, I would recommend rejection on the grounds that the gray facial skin was not observed. Although other marks noted are consistent with Glossy Ibis, a first state record should be 100% satisfactory. The differences in the extent of the white border described by Cairo could be due to differences in plumage state. Iris color is notoriously difficult to ascertain, and Cairo did not take as much care with this as the Janoses. Didn't anyone else try to find his bird? Latham is within easy striking distance for most Denver-Boulder birders. Again, a photo would have been very helpful. All birders who can afford to carry a telephoto should do so.

I predict that Glossy Ibis, a notorious wanderer, will be found much more frequently in Colorado once observers check all Plegadis.

Sincerely,

J. V. Remsen, Jr.  
Curator of Birds &  
Adj. Assoc. Prof. Zoology

7-86-10

JON DUNN

4710 DEXTER DRIVE  
SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA 93110  
805-967-2450

22 Nov. 1986

Dear Peter,

Sorry to take so long to get back to you on these Colorado Glossy Ibis reports but I've been in Israel the last couple of weeks and I just didn't get to it before I left.

I should start off by saying that I would consider myself that qualified to review this problem. I haven't had that much opportunity to see both species together. Someone from Louisiana would be the logical choice to review these records. I would suggest sending them on to Van Remsen (Museum of Zoology, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216) for collective review of the LSU gang or Doug Pratt (4583 Downing Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70809) who knows quite a bit about the problem.

Having said this I did spend a day (12 April 1985) at Venice near the mouth of the Mississippi River where I did have the opportunity to see lots of Plegadis Ibis at close range. I had both species and all plumages and took a fair amount of notes. Since these two Colorado records are for spring I think my comments could be useful.

Clearly the key area in identifying Plegadis Ibis in the spring (at least) is the face. All of the Glossy Ibis I saw, including the immatures, showed a distinctive bluish-white line that bordered the grayish facial skin. It was above and below the eye, but didn't actually encircle the eye (in the exact pattern that has been described for this species). The immature White-faced Ibis (birds about 10 months old I would guess) lacked any trace of a pale line. Also, they had a slight pinkish cast to the skin in front of the eye (visible at close range). They did show a dull red iris (duller than adults) but that was visible only at very close range.

In reviewing the two reports, clearly the report from Sweitzer Lake is the best. The pale border to the gray face is described just right for a Glossy Ibis, except that is described as white rather than bluish-white. From my limited experience I found the bluish color to be quite easy to see. The grayer legs would also seem to favor Glossy Ibis as would the dark iris.

I find the Latham Reservoir bird to be less convincing. There really isn't enough of a description to determine with certainty that the bird is an adult. One thing one has to watch for with Glossy Ibis reports is immature White-faced Ibis (1st spring plumage which also has extensive chestnut in plumage) with flocks of breeding adults. What particularly troubles me about this bird is that no distinct pale line was noted bordering the facial skin. From my limited experience this would eliminate Glossy Ibis from consideration. It would seem more likely then that the bird could have been an immature White-faced which would have duller pink facial skin and a duller iris color than the accompanying breeding adults. At least I wouldn't consider the report acceptable as Glossy.

So in review I consider the report from Sweitzer Lake to be pretty solid, but you may still want to await a clear photo prior to acceptance on the state list. I find the report from Latham Reservoir to be much less convincing. In any event I would suggest additional review by the Louisiana authorities.

Sorry, I can't be of more help. I have kept the xeroxes of these reports. Please let me know if you want them returned.

(over)

7-86-10

We had an average fall in Calif. with a few very nice birds (Eurasian Dotterel, Am Purple Gallinule and Sedge Wren) but somewhat fewer eastern vagrants than we normally get. We did have a banner year for Red-throated Pipits with one lingering here in Santa Barbara to the middle of November.

All best,

Jan I. Ben



H. Douglas Pratt, Ph.D.

artist - ornithologist

504/  
928-4297

7-86-10  
7-86-10

4583 Downing Drive · Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70809

18 December 1986

Peter Gent  
55 South 35th. St.  
Boulder, CO 80303

Dear Peter:

I regret that it has taken me so long to respond to your inquiries about recent reports of Glossy Ibises in Colorado. I have been travelling a great deal since July, and my time at home has had so many demands on it that I just now am able to give you an adequate evaluation of the reports. I should warn you that this is an ID problem that for reasons I cannot explain remains controversial despite well researched criteria for separating the two species. I recently had the experience of identifying a well-photographed ibis from Texas as a Glossy, only to learn that some other "expert" had disagreed. Inasmuch as the photograph showed every diagnostic character of Glossy Ibis and none of the identifying marks of the White-faced I wonder whether Glossy Ibis will ever appear on the Texas list. Better documentation is unlikely to be obtained, because it rests largely on soft-part coloration which is lost in specimens.

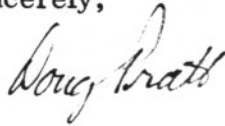
Both of the observations documented in the forms you sent me were, in my opinion, of Glossy Ibises. Both observers saw all of the salient diagnostic characters. There are no others, and thus you will never obtain a "better" sight record. Frankly, either the birds were Glossies or the observers are lying. I am particularly favorably impressed by the careful documentation of the 1986 sighting, which, by the way it is worded, indicated that the observer was not just repeating descriptive material from the field guides. The 1985 bird is less well-described, but still can only have been a Glossy Ibis. In both cases, the birds were in alternate plumage, and that makes the case even stronger. My experience in Louisiana is that virtually all ibises whose eye color and facial skin can be seen can be identified to species nearly year round, and no dark ibis I have ever seen in breeding plumage was of questionable status. We have had good success separating the species on our Christmas counts, based on facial skin and eye color, even though they are in basic plumage then. The only time of year when ibis identification might present difficulty is in the early fall, because we do not yet know how soon species-specific eye color develops in birds of the year. Certainly by December, enough color

shows in skin and eye for most birds to be accurately identified. Spring birds, such as those reported in Colorado, are the easiest of all to distinguish.

Although I am a supporter of the principle that first state records are best documented by a collected specimen, I would make an exception in the case of dark ibises because the most important identifying marks are not well preserved in specimens (some specimens can be identified with certainty, but many cannot; I think this has contributed to the reluctance of museum workers to accept field identifications of ibises). Frankly, I would rather have a well-written account of a sight record, such as that of Mark Janos, than a specimen to document the first state record of Glossy Ibis. A photograph would only prove that the observer saw what he says he saw (and might even be misleading because of the vagaries of light) and a specimen would be only as valuable as the soft part color notes on its tag.

I realize that there will still be doubters, but I think you have a new species for Colorado. Glossy Ibises have been popping up all over lately, so the records are not unexpected. The fact that they fit a pattern is another point in their favor. I appreciate your sending these observations to me, and I hope the above information is what you need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Doug Pratt".

H. Douglas Pratt