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Glossy Ibis at Hayden, Colorado, 28 Apr 2003

On the afternoon 28 Apr 2003 Brian Gibbons and I were leading a Victor Emanuel Nature Tours group birding in Colorado. We were heading to California Park Road from Steamboat Springs and en route noticed a group of White-faced Ibis feeding in a puddle very near the road about 2 miles east of Hayden. I was in the lead van and pulled off to check the flock for Glossy Ibis. They were only about 100 ft off the road so I tried to pull off as smoothly as possible so as not to startle them. As I pulled off, all heads came up and I immediately scanned the flock and noticed an adult Glossy Ibis as the second bird from the right. I held my binoculars on the bird and at the same time called the birds in loudly over the hand-held radios that we carry so as to alert Brian to the bird and to also alert the 6 participants in my van to the bird. I held the bird in my binoculars for about 10 seconds before the birds took flight as a group, probably because Brian's van had arrived behind me and the presence of two vehicles was too much for them. For the next two minutes I watched the flock circle over the small, shallow, pond, and all the while I called out directions as to which bird was the Glossy in flight. After two minutes of circling the birds headed out to the west towards Hayden, but eventually circled and landed in another shallow pool about 500 ft off the road. We quickly loaded the vans and drove west to attempt scope views. At this vantage the birds were more distant but we were able to check the entire flock (9 White-faced, 1 Glossy) in the scope. The Glossy Ibis was an adult in breeding plumage and stood out easily from the White-faced even at that distance. I made the attached sketch while watching the birds, but unfortunately had relatively little time to study the field marks since I spent most of my time pointing the bird out to the group. After about 10 minutes of observation from this vantage, a Peregrine Falcon swooped low over the flock and flushed the birds. When they flew, the 9 White-faced Ibis headed off in one direction and the Glossy Ibis split off to head out to the east.

Description: A *Plegadis* ibis, 10-15% larger than most (7/9) White-faced Ibis in the group, about equal in size to two White-faced Ibis. This size difference was most obvious in flight and made it quite easy to keep track of the Glossy Ibis, although the other two larger White-faced Ibis did confuse the issue. There were no other obvious structural differences.

All birds in the flock were adults, with obviously reddish heads and necks, dark underparts, and glossy green iridescence on the back and wing feathers. No birds had any streaking about the head or neck. The White-faced Ibis varied in the amount of white feathering coming in around their faces.

The face pattern of the Glossy Ibis was distinctive. Compared to the reddish or pinkish facial skin that was apparent on all White-faced Ibis present, the Glossy Ibis showed dark grayish, almost blackish, facial skin between the eye and the bill. This facial skin was obviously framed by a pale bluish border that had a distinctive shape. Whereas the White-faced Ibis has a white border that completely encircled the eye, the Glossy Ibis had a distinct narrow bluish line along the upper border of the facial skin between the eye and the upper base of the maxilla. There was no pale border behind the eye, but below the eye a somewhat concave line extended from below the eye to the base of the mandible. Thus there appeared to be essentially two parallel lines framing the bare facial skin of the face. I could not confirm that the pale area was skin rather than feathers, but this did seem to be the case.

Most White-faced Ibis had obviously reddish legs, especially around the joints. The Glossy Ibis seemed to have overall grayish legs.

Because I had limited time to study the birds through the scope, I could not ascertain the eye color (it probably would not have been discernible at that range). Nor was I able to look closely at the scapular pattern to see if differences in the reflectivity or overall color of the greenish sheen were upheld with this bird. The identification thus rested almost entirely on the views of the facial skin color and pattern, but fortunately this was very easy to see.

I have seen White-faced Ibis and Glossy Ibis in direct comparison on a number of occasions. I have seen lone White-faced Ibis among Glossy Ibis flocks in NJ (May 2001), DE (July 1997), MD (May 1999, May 2000), and VA (May 2001), and lone Glossies among flocks of White-faced in Louisiana (Sep 1999), Texas (about 8 times), and Colorado (Apr 2001, Ft Collins (2) and Rocky Ford, both submitted to the CO Records Committee). On all occasions Glossy Ibis appeared to average larger (contra The Sibley Guide to Birds), showed the face pattern characteristics described above, a dark eye, duller legs, and in most cases where I could observe it well, showed a difference in the pattern and coloration of the glossy back and wing feathers.

Tony Leukering informs me that if accepted, this would represent the 2nd West Slope record for Colorado, following a bird seen last fall at Durango. Given the range explosion of this species, future records can certainly be expected. Please do not hesitate to contact me if there are any question.

Respectfully submitted,

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