

Status and Occurrence of White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin and Don Cecile.

Introduction and Distribution

The White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*) is a species found breeding in western North America from eastern Oregon in the Harney Basin, in the central and northern California at the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge, across southern Idaho, Montana, across eastern North and South Dakota, northwestern Iowa, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas and Louisiana (Ryder and Manry 1994). The White-faced Ibis also breeds in Mexico in the states of Durango and Jalisco, and as far south as Tampico Lagoons (100 pairs) and Tabasco Lagoons (500 birds), but the Mexican breeding distribution is poorly known (Ryder and Manry 1994). The White-faced Ibis also is found in South America, mainly in southwestern Peru, central Bolivia, Paraguay, and extreme southern Brazil (Short 1975, Sick 1993) south to central Chile and central Argentina (Blake 1977, Fjeldså and Krabbe 1990). In previously published literature, Hancock *et al.* (1992) consider that previously accepted nesting records in Venezuela and Colombia (AOU 1983) actually refer to the very similar looking Glossy Ibis (Gochfeld 1973). Recent analysis of banding recoveries seems to support this conclusion (Ryder and Manry 1994). The White-faced Ibis winter primarily in coastal Louisiana and Texas, south to the Mexican states of Guerrero, Puebla, and Tabasco, and occasionally to Guatemala (Land 1970) and Costa Rica (Stiles and Skutch 1989). There are also wintering White-faced Ibis that can be found at Los Banos and the Salton Sea, in California (Ryder and Manry 1994). This species is also found locally wintering in southern California, and in the lower Colorado River Valley of Arizona (Rosenberg *et al.* 1991).

The White-faced Ibis wanders throughout much of eastern North America with records from many different states and Provinces. In the west, the White-faced Ibis is an irruptive species in Washington State that has dramatically increased in the frequency of records since 1981 (Wahl *et al.* 2005). Most records come from the east side of the state from the Columbia basin, however, there are many records from the west side of Washington State (Wahl *et al.* 2005). Birds pushing northward, especially in the spring, is a result of drought and a lack of breeding habitat in the south (Wahl *et al.* 2005). In British Columbia, the White-faced Ibis is a casually occurring species with over 35 Provincial records (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). There are no records for Alaska (Gibson *et al.* 2013).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the White-faced Ibis is covered in all standard North American field guides. The following description is taken from Ryder and Manry (1994). This species is a medium-sized wading bird, dark maroon brown with long neck, long, decurved bill, and long legs. The total length of the bird is 46–56 cm, the weight 450–525 grams. The bill, legs, and toes are blackish.

In Alternate (breeding) plumage, the head, neck, upper back, wing coverts, and the undersides are a dark chestnut-maroon colour with a metallic green and bronze sheen. The wings have purplish overtones. The bare facial skin becomes reddish purple in the spring. Also in the spring, the white feathers appear on head separating forehead from face, extending completely around the back of the eye. The iris is reddish-brown. Adult alternate plumaged White-faced Ibis is distinguished from Alternate plumaged Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) by a red versus brown iris, red versus blackish facial skin, all red versus all grayish legs, and the border of white feathers which completely separates the bill and the eye from the rest of the dark head. The Glossy Ibis lacks these white feathers, but has dark loreal skin connecting the bill and eyes. This skin is margined above and below with a narrow strip of very pale skin. This marking superficially resembles the white feather border of the White-faced Ibis, but it does not encircle the back of the eye as on a White-faced Ibis (Kaufman 1990). Immatures of both species are difficult to separate until White-faced Ibis develops a red iris (often during the first fall). Basic (nonbreeding) plumaged adults often indistinguishable from Basic plumaged Glossy Ibis, but White-faced Ibis has a red versus brown iris, dark facial skin with no border of white feathers. The Glossy Ibis retains pale edges on the dark loreal skin throughout the winter, but this character is sometimes difficult to see (Kaufman 1990).

It is important to try and photograph any Ibis encountered in immature and winter plumage on the chance it could be a wayward Glossy Ibis. Outside of breeding plumaged adults, the identification on all other plumages requires good, detailed views to make a safe identification.

Occurrence and Documentation

In British Columbia, the White-faced Ibis is a casual species with 39 Provincial records (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). There are 26 records from the spring migration period from April 1 – June 10 (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). The birds that have turned up in this time period are likely spring overshoots in migration as there are no breeding records for British Columbia (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). One of the main factors that drives this bird north in the spring is when there are severe drought conditions in the species' core range (Ryder and Manry 1994, Wahl *et al.* 2005). This explanation does fit many records that involve multiple birds, but some birds could just be overshoots that were thrown off course by large weather events. There are no confirmed breeding records for British Columbia with only 2 summer records in the July – August time period (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). The lack of breeding evidence is reflected in that there are only 8 fall records from the September – November time period (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). It is likely these birds were birds that became off course in the fall or were possibly post breeding wanderers that went too far north of their core range. This species has occurred throughout British Columbia with 21 records from the interior, 4 records from the Vancouver area, 13 from Vancouver Island, 1 from the Queen Charlotte

Islands, and 1 historical skin specimen from Chilliwack (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). It is likely this species will continue to venture north in the future. It is important for all observers to be aware that Glossy Ibis could turn up in the Province as a vagrant and all fall birds should be photographed and carefully examined for this potential species.



Figures 1 & 2: Record #25: White-faced Ibis at Latetia Creek, Sandspit, Queen Charlotte Island on October 13, 2004. Photos © Brian & Margaret Charma.



Figures 3 & 4: Record #36: A flock of 12 White-faced Ibis at Separation Lake, outside Kamloops. Photos © Al Russell (left) and Rick Toochin (right).



Figures 5 & 6: Record #36: A flock of 12 White-faced Ibis at Separation Lake, outside Kamloops. Photos © Al Russell.



Figure 7: Record #36: White-faced Ibis (2) at Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A, outside Merritt. Photos © David Baker.



Figure 8: Record #36: White-faced Ibis (1 of 2) at Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A, outside Merritt. Photos © David Baker

Table 1: Records of White-faced Ibis for British Columbia

- 1.(1) 1800's: Saltspring Island (Fannin 1891, Kermodé 1904, Macoun and Macoun 1909)
- 2.(1) 1800's: Richmond (Fannin 1891)
- 3.(1) sub-adult summer 1902: Allan Brooks (specimen: RBCM 1587) Luckakuck Creek, Chilliwack (Brooks 1917, Campbell *et al.* 1990a)
- 4.(2) adults May 9-12, 1968: (RBCM Photo 257) Wasa Lake, Cranbrook (Eastman 1974)
- 5.(1) adult May 24, 1982: Keith Taylor: Quick's Bottom (Anonymous 1982h, Campbell *et al.* 1990a)
- 6.(1) adult May 24, 1982: Yorke Edwards: Beach Dr., Oak Bay (Anonymous 1983j, Campbell *et al.* 1990a) (likely different bird to the one above)
- 7.(3) adults May 17-20, 1983: Barry Zettergreen (RBCM Photo 1216) Gadsden-Burgess Provincial Park, near Golden (Zettergreen 1988)
- 8.(1) adult July 20, 1983: Keith Taylor, Charles Harper: Cordova Spit, Central Saanich (Anonymous 1983j, Campbell 1983c, Campbell *et al.* 1990a)
- 9.(1) adult May 22-31, 1985: Separation Lake, near Kamloops (Campbell 1985c, Campbell *et al.* 1990a)
- 10.(1) immature molted into adult November 2, 1986-May 8, 1987: H. & R. Williams, mobs (Photo 1148) Port Hardy (Fraser 1987a, Campbell 1987a, Campbell *et al.* 1990a)
- 11.(1) immature October 14 & 18-19, 1989: Gordon Houston, Shane Ford, and other observers: Central Saanich (Weber and Cannings 1990)

- 12.(1) adult April 13-22, 1994: Kathy Jones, Barbara Kemmis, mobs (photo) Kelowna
(Bowling 1994a, Charlesworth 1994, Davidson 1995)
- 13.(1) age unknown September 29-October 13, 1995: Marion Innes, Beety Hagen, Rosamund
Pojar, mobs (photo) Allen Ranch, Kispiox (Bowling 1996a)
- 14.(1) adult May 4-June 3, 1998: *fide Vancouver Bird Alert* (photo) Drury Inlet
(R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 15.(1) adult September 20, 1999: Vision Foundation (photo) Courtenay Airpark, Courtenay
(Shepard 2000)
- 16.(1) adult June 8, 2000: Tim Pirk : Iona Island Sewage Ponds, Richmond (Toochin *et al.* 2014c)
- 17.(1) immature November 3, 2001: N. Bourne: Naniamo (Bain 2001f)
- 18.(7) adults May 14-17, 2001: Emily Watts, and other observers (photo) Somenos Marsh,
Duncan (Cecile 2001b)
(3) adults May 19 & 28, 2001: Derrick Marven, and other observers (photo) Somenos Marsh,
Duncan (Cecile 2001b)
- 19.(2) adults May 18-19, 2001: *fide Guy Monty* (photo) Sayward (Cecile 2001b)
- 20.(1) adult May 17, 2002: mobs : Creston (Linda Van Damme Pers. Comm.)
- 21.(10) adults May 21-27, 2002: mobs (photo) Elizabeth Lake, Cranbrook (Cecile 2002c)
- 22.(1) adult July 28, 2002: mobs : Creston (Linda Van Damme Pers. Comm.)
- 23.(1) immature September 18 & 20, 2003: KLo, MTo & RTo: 96th-104th St., Boundary Bay, Delta
& Highway 91, Surrey (Toochin *et al.* 2014c)
(1) immature September 27, 2003: near 67th Ave. and 176th St., Cloverdale (Toochin *et al.* 2014c)
- 24.(1) adult May 5, 2004: mobs : Irrigation Fields, Cranbrook (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 25.(1) immature October 13-14, 2004: Brian & Margaret Charma (photo) Latetia Creek,
Sandspit, QCI (Cecile 2005a)
- 26.(10) adults May 23, 2006: Dean Nicholson (photo) Elizabeth Lake, Cranbrook (Cecile 2006c)
- 27.(3) adults May 9, 2007: *fide Linda Van Damme*: Leach Lake, Creston
(Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 28.(5) adults May 17, 2008: Rick Toochin: Sooke (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 29.(1) adult June 3, 2009: mobs : Kelowna (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 30.(1) adult May 13 & 15, 2012: Gary Breault (photo) Speers Road, Creston (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 31.(1) adult May 20, 2012: Gwynneth Wilson, mobs (photo) (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 32.(1) adult May 10, 2013: Dean Nicholson, mobs (photo) Cranbrook (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 33.(1) adult May 31, 2013: Andrew Cooke, mobs (photo) Mandarte Island, off Sidney
(J. Fenneman Pers. Comm.)
(1) adult June 6, 2013: Tim Hickanal: Victoria Harbour along Westsong Way below Barnard
Park (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 34.(1) adult May 14-17, 2014: mobs: Wilmer (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 35.(60+) adults May 14, 2014: mobs: Bummer Flats, near Cranbrook (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 36.(12) adults May 13-16, 2015: Chris Chutter, mobs (photo) Separation Lake, near Kamloops
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
(2-6) adults May 17-19, 2015: Daryl Livingstone, mobs: Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
(1) adult May 18, 2015: Tod Kohler: Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)

- (6) adults May 19, 2015: Wayne Weber: Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- (2) adults May 23, 2015: Daryl Livingstone, mobs: Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- (6) adults May 24, 2015: Caroline Knox: Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- (1-5) adults May 30, 2015: Quentin Brown, mobs (photo) Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- (1) adult June 1, 2015: Darcie Arcand (photo) Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- (1-2) adults June 2-22, 2015: mobs (photo) Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- (1) adult July 6, 2015: Len and Dianne Jellicoe (photo) Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- (3) adults July 8, 2015: Alan Burger (photo) Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- (2) adults July 10, 2015: Rob Lyske (photo) Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- (1) adult July 12, 2015: Dan and Rick Tyson (photo) Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(D. Tyson Pers. Comm.)
- (1) adult July 18, 2015: Wayne, Thor and Brent Diakow (photo) Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A (M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- (2) adults July 20, 2015: Rick Howie, mobs (photo) Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- (4) adults August 10, 2015: Steve Ansell, mobs (photo) Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- (2) adults September 7, 2015: David and Paul Baker (photo) Beaver Ranch Flats, along Highway 5A (D. Baker Pers. Comm.)
- 37.(1) adult May 17, 2015: Wayne and Brent Diakow: Revelstoke (M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- 38.(1) juvenile September 10, 2015: Nathan Polak, mobs (photo) Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner (J. Fenneman Pers. Comm.)
- 39.(1) immature September 24, 2015: Dusty Veideman, mobs (photo) Revelstoke
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)

Hypothetical records:

- 1.(8) adults June 19, 2009: *fide David Allinson*: Somenos Marsh, Duncan
(Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 2.(1) age unknown November 3, 2002: *fide Jamie Fenneman*: Nanaimo
(J. Fenneman Pers. Comm.)
- 3.(1) age unknown July 16, 2006: *fide Jamie Fenneman*: Prospect Lake, Saanich
(J. Fenneman Pers. Comm.)

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