

White Ibis *Eudocimus albus*



Folk Name: White Curlew, Brown Curlew

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Rare

Habitat: Shallow water pools, ponds, streams, mudflats

The White Ibis is the most common type of ibis found in the Carolina Piedmont. It is a large white wading bird normally encountered in the Coastal Plain and along the coast of both Carolinas. It has black wing tips and a long, down-curved, reddish-pink bill. Most of our records are of immature birds which are mostly brown with white underparts. White Ibis are a highly social species and are often encountered in flocks around their breeding sites and while dispersing away from their breeding colonies during the summer.

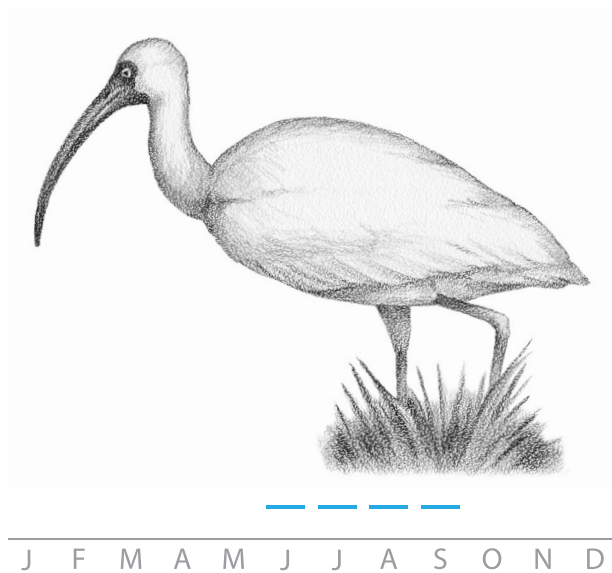
Inland dispersal of ibis after breeding, most often occurs during the months of July and August. In July 1914, the month World War I began, *The Charlotte News* published this account of curlews (most likely White Ibis) that showed up in Brevard “far from home”:

Last Saturday three strange birds paused here in a flight from some storm-beaten beach and alighted in a tree on Main Street. At first they were thought to be cranes, but when J.E. Clayton took a shot at them and brought one of them down, it was pronounced by Mr. E.T. Henning, familiar with the coast, to be a curlew. A long way from home, certainly, and perhaps flying from a coast storm.

Between the 1920s and early 1950s, the White Ibis expanded its breeding range from the Gulf Coast, Florida, and Georgia, into the Carolinas. It was first discovered nesting in South Carolina at the Fairlawn Plantation in 1922 and in North Carolina at Lennon’s Marsh near Lumberton in May 1950. Since 1950, the number of breeding pairs and breeding sites has grown in both Carolinas. Post-breeding wanderers were occasionally seen inland in the Carolinas in the 1960s, becoming more common in the 1970s and 1980s, and, by the 1990s, post-breeding dispersal to inland areas had become an annual occurrence.

There were only six reports of White Ibis from the region prior to the year 2000. Since then, there have been more than 20, and, since 2010, White Ibis has been reported around Charlotte once or twice annually. All White Ibis seen in this region have been reported between 19 June and 15 September.

Details of the twentieth century reports are summarized here. Don Martin photographed the first



White Ibis found wandering into Mecklenburg County on August 23, 1965. Bill Scott found three immature birds near Cane Creek Park in Union County on August 10, 1979. Harriett Whitsett watched a flock of about 15 adult White Ibis “flying in a line” over Charlotte on July 14, 1983, providing one of our few records of adult birds. Derek Carrigan found one White Ibis at Oxford Dam at Lake Hickory on August 29, 1987. David Wright found a White Ibis visiting a crayfish-rearing pond off Neck Road on August 2–4, 1996. The pond had been recently drained for maintenance. Three White Ibis were present at a pond in northern Mecklenburg County from 14 July through at least the first week of August in 1998. Danny Swicegood found a lone White Ibis resting on the edge of the observation ponds at Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge on June 27, 2000.



Immature White Ibis in Mint Hill. (Jeff Lemons)