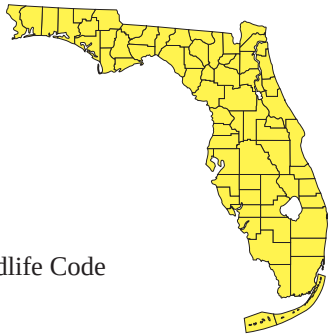
WHITE IBIS
Eudocimus albus



Order: Ciconiiformes
Family: Threskiornithidae
FNAI Ranks: G5/S4
U.S. Status: None
FL Status: Species of Special Concern
U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.

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Description: Medium-sized wading bird with long, downward-curving bill. Adults white except for black tips on wings and pink to reddish coloration on exposed flesh around face, bill, and legs. Young birds are dark brown on wings, neck, head, and tail, but noticeable white patches occur on back and belly. Juveniles begin to acquire adult coloration near end of first year but retain some brown feathers on head and neck until third year.

Similar Species: Glossy ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) also has a downward-curving bill but is uniformly dark. Adult glossy ibis has purplish coloration, and young birds are uniformly brown. An immature glossy ibis could be mistaken for a juvenile white ibis, but glossy ibis lacks the white patch on the back (best seen during flight) and belly is dark, not white. Bills of all egrets and herons are straight, not curved.

Habitat: Found in a wide variety of habitats, including freshwater and brackish marshes, salt flats and salt marsh meadows, many types of forested wetlands, wet prairies, swales, seasonally inundated fields, and man-made ditches. Adults prefer foraging in freshwater areas when feeding young. Young birds do not grow when fed a salty diet or when access to fresh water

is limited. Forage by feeling with their bills and may forage effectively in turbid waters. Nests are placed on a variety trees, shrubs, and vines, and tend to be closer to ground than other colonially nesting wading birds.

Seasonal Occurrence: May be found throughout Florida during all seasons, but numbers in north Florida are smaller and diminish sharply in winter. Numbers also vary depending on local water levels and conditions. Spring and fall movements can be spectacular, with hundreds of individuals observed moving in long, V-shaped lines. Much of movement pattern seems nomadic; large-scale movements occur in other seasons in response to changing water levels. Dates of spring movements can be mid-February, and fall movements may begin in July and peak in September and October. In non-breeding season, Florida probably supports much of population that breeds to north in Georgia and North and South Carolina.

Florida Distribution: Found throughout Florida, but breeding season distributions more closely restricted to breeding colonies. Breeding sites rare in panhandle and may be less common in Keys. Seem to be nomadic when selecting annual nesting sites, so numbers can vary considerably from year to year.

Range-wide Distribution: Breeds from California south through Central America along Pacific coast; from northern South America through Caribbean and Antilles and north Gulf coast (with inland nesting in northern South America and southeastern U.S.); northward along Atlantic coast to Virginia.

Conservation Status: Population declines in Florida appear to have been pronounced over the past decades (around 50 percent from 1970 to 1990). However, declines in Florida have been offset to some degree by increasing numbers in other nearby states. Range-wide declines in Florida and neighboring states are believed to be occurring, but these can be difficult to document in the absence of thorough surveys.

Protection and Management: Protect colonial nesting sites from human disturbance. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Department of Environmental Protection have developed setback distances around wading bird colonies of 330 ft. (100 m) to prevent such disturbance. These guidelines may serve to protect individual colonies, but primary long-term threat is degradation of wetlands through destruction, alteration, pollution, salinization, and other forms of disturbance. Large-scale restoration efforts in the Everglades, Lake Okeechobee, Kissimmee River, and elsewhere should prove beneficial.

Selected References: Poole and Gill (eds.) 1992, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers and Smith 1995, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Runde et al. 1991, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.