

A California Riceland Success Story

With its prehistoric nuances and iridescent color, the White-faced Ibis is one of the biggest success stories involving wildlife in California ricelands. After its population dipped to dangerously low levels in the 1940s through the 1980s, this long-legged wading bird has made a tremendous comeback. Rice fields are a prime source of ibis habitat.



Current and past population data:

The winter population reached a low point in the 1970s then began rising in the 1980s with a sharp increase in the early 1990s. Estimates from the mid 1990s show winter populations in California at 28,000, and numbers appear to be continuing to increase, particularly in the Sacramento Valley rice country. The number of known breeders in the Central Valley began increasing in the 1980s. The Colusa National Wildlife Refuge population increased from 50 to 500 pairs from 1985 to 1989. The Mendota Wildlife Area was recolonized in 1992, coinciding with increased availability of semi-permanent wetlands and irrigated uplands, and the colony continued to grow substantially through 1997. No population objectives have been developed for wintering or breeding ibis in this region.

Information regarding each species' benefit to rice growers:

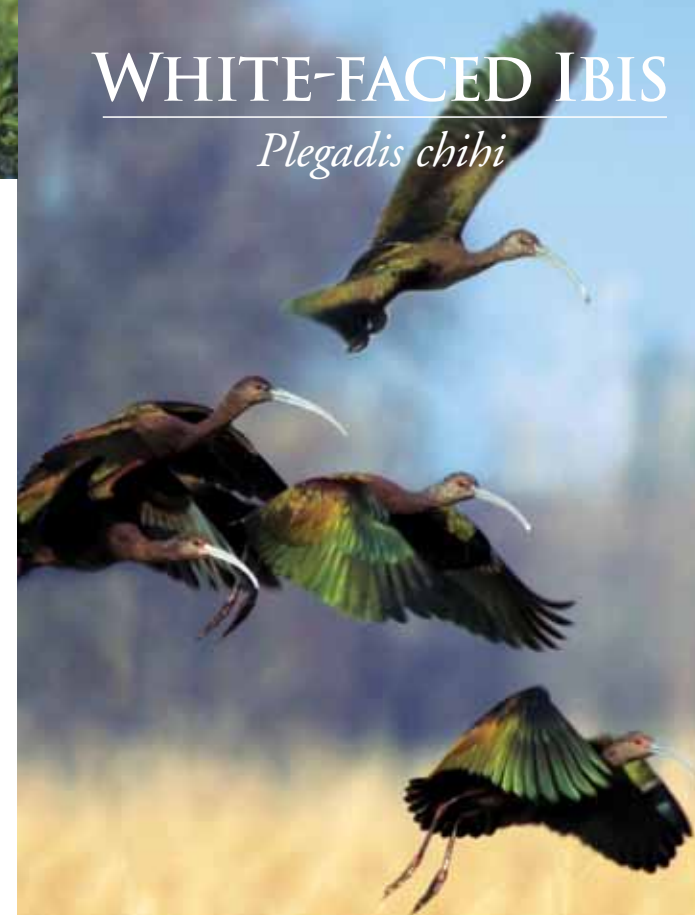
Ibis may eat some invertebrate pests in rice fields, and heavy use of winter-flooded fields by ibis may help in rice stubble decomposition.



CALIFORNIA RICE

WHITE-FACED IBIS

Plegadis chihi



SPECIES IN FOCUS

Prepared by:



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WHITE-FACED IBIS

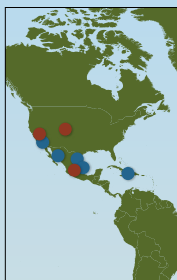
Plegadis chihi

Appearance



Size: 18–22 in
Weight: 16–19 oz

Medium-sized waterbird with long legs and long bill that curves down. Dark brown body feathers with green, bronze and purplish sheen. During the breeding season (April–August) a white-feathered border appears around reddish facial skin. Legs also become reddish.



● APRIL–AUGUST
● NOVEMBER–MARCH

Range

Breeds (April–August) in parts of central and western United States and central Mexico. Winters (November–March) from central California south into Mexico, Guatemala and Costa Rica and along the Gulf Coast in Texas and Louisiana.

Habitat



Breeds inland mainly in shallow marshes with patches of emergent vegetation. In California a variety of flooded agricultural land is used for foraging during the breeding season, but rice and flood-irrigated alfalfa and pasture are key agricultural habitats in the state. During migration and winter irrigated fields, flooded agricultural lands, mudflats around lakes, sewage ponds and marshes are important.

Food/feeding



Forages in shallow water for aquatic and moist-soil insects, crustaceans and earthworms.

Behavior



Typically fly in large flocks in a V formation. Although birds may sometimes forage alone, usually found in groups during foraging, nesting, roosting and migrating. During nonbreeding season, birds congregate in massive nighttime roosts at favored marshes near daytime agricultural foraging areas.

Conservation Status



Current conservation concern rankings are low. Formerly considered at risk, but concern has greatly lessened with an expanding population. Accumulation of toxins from DDE residues that persist in the soil from historical use remain a threat, especially in the Imperial Valley. General protection provided under wildlife laws such as the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act.



◀ *White-faced Ibis in flight: the typical wingspan of an adult male White-faced Ibis is 1 meter.*

Benefits of rice cultivation to species/group

Ibis forage extensively in flooded growing rice in summer and in post-harvest flooded rice in winter but use rice to only a limited degree in the intervening period in early fall.

Additional benefits of adjacent managed wetlands to species/group

Managed wetlands provide foraging and roosting habitat. Those that include islands of emergent vegetation provide nesting habitat as well.