Pink and Orange Ibises in Coastal Georgetown County, South Carolina

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Since at least the late 1960s, up to 20,000 breeding pairs of White Ibises (*Eudocimus albus*) have traditionally nested on Pumpkinseed Island in Winyah Bay, Georgetown County, South Carolina (Bildstein 1993). Between 10 May and 15 August 1989, I made several visits each week to this breeding colony site and monitored ibis activity at nearby marshes and swamps.

Although White Ibises at this colony site appear dingy as a result of stained feathers, in 1989, D. Bauer, M. Frix, J. Johnston, B. McCraith, and I observed two ibises with colorful plumage. On 15 May 1989, I observed a pale pink ibis (a pale tint of Smithe color #3 [Vinaceous], Smithe 1975) at the colony site. The black-tipped outer primary feathers were paler than the rest of the plumage. The facial skin and legs were light red. The bill was black and relatively short. There is noticeable sexual dimorphism in the bill size of White Ibises (Kushlan 1977), thus suggesting that this bird was a female. When first sighted, this bird was standing on a nest among a group of about 75 White Ibis nests in black needlerush (*Juncus roemerianus*). When approached the bird took flight, flew in circled overhead, and then settled down at the same location. I saw this bird again in the same general location on 16 and 17 May.

On 21 May at 1000 h, I observed a vibrant, pinkish-orange ibis (between Smithe colors #14 [Scarlet] and #15 [Flame Scarlet], Smithe 1975) at the colony site. The black-tipped outer primary feathers were paler than the rest of the plumage. The facial skin, legs, and gular pouch were brilliant, glossy red (Smithe color #11 [Spectrum Red]), and the bill was dark, glossy black. The bill length of this bird suggested that it was a female. Compared with White Ibises at the colony site, the shape of the gular pouch of this bird (compare Rudegeair 1975) was larger, shinier, and more pendulous, and was dotted with warty protuberances. A well-defined fringe of pale feathers (similar to Smithe color #92 [Pale Horn Color], Smithe 1975) surrounded the face. In subadult White Ibises, the feathers on the head are the last to be replaced and sometimes are not molted until spring of the third year (De Santo et al., 1990 and unpublished). Although a sharp demarcation between juvenal and adult feathers is not typical in White Ibises, the pale feathers of this bird might have been remnants of juvenal plumage. When first sighted, this bird was perched

on a clump of black needlerush on the periphery of a cluster of around 100 White Ibis nests about 150 m north of where the pink ibis had been seen. The bird was not tending a nest. At 1030 h the bird left the island with a flock of 25 adult White Ibises, flying north out of view. At 1600 h, it was again seen at the colony site in the same location. When approached, it flew about 100 m to the eastern edge of the island and landed on the ground, where it remained at least until I left an hour later.

Although I continued to make regular trips to the colony site until mid-August, I did not see either of these colorful ibises again.

Both birds were photographed with a 210 mm lens from distances of 30 - 50 m. Copies of the photographs are on file at the Charleston Museum (360 Meeting Street, Charleston, SC 29403).

Ibises have ben studied at the colony site since 1979, but pink and orange ibises have not been previously reported. In 1987, a pink ibis was observed in the Charleston area (Belser 1989). As previously suggested (Belser 1989) these rare, colorful visitors to coastal South Carolina are likely to be either hybrids of Scarlet (*Eudocimus ruber*) and White Ibises (Ramo and Busto 1982, 1987) or Scarlet Ibises lacking proper amounts of dietary carotenoids (Fox 1962, Zuquim Antas 1979).

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