

2024 Site Environmental Report

VOLUME 1





The front and inside covers for this year's Site Environmental Report (SER) feature images of glossy ibises (*Plegadis falcinellus*) wading in a waterlogged field adjacent to the National Synchrotron Light Source II (NSLS-II). This small- to medium-sized wading bird measures approximately two feet in height with a wingspan of three feet and is known for its long, sickle-shaped bill. From a distance and in poor light, their plumage may look dark and drab, but up close the maroon wings gleam in metallic green, bronze, and violet tones.

The glossy ibis is one of three species of ibis commonly found in North America, but the glossy ibis is the only species that regularly appears on Long Island. In fact, it is only a fairly recent arrival to the western hemisphere, first recorded in Florida in the early 1900s and only seen breeding for the first time in New York in 1961. They originate from Africa, and in ancient Egypt, ibises were considered sacred and a representation of the god Thoth—the god of the moon, science, mathematics, and patron of scribes. It is thought that the glossy ibis rode the trade winds from Africa to the Caribbean or South America and gradually expanded its range north. On Long Island, it can be found along the south shore from April through August, but it is a rarity inland and at the Lab. In fact, in over 25 years of bird surveys that have been conducted at the Lab, it has only been found on two occasions.

New York is near the northern extent of their range as they breed along the Atlantic Coast. They frequent fresh water, brackish, and salt water wetlands, marshes, and estuaries, as well as wet fields where they forage in shallow waters and mud for small fish, insects, worms, mollusks, amphibians, and plants by using their curved bills to feel around for prey.

Glossy ibises nest in large, dense colonies, often with other species of wading birds. Their nests are bulky platforms composed of reeds and sticks about a foot in diameter. They are often constructed a few feet above water, although they will occasionally nest on the ground. They typically lay three to four pale blue or green eggs that hatch in about twenty days with both parents taking turns caring for the eggs and young. At six to seven weeks of age, the young can fly and will accompany their parents to feeding areas.

Glossy ibis are now widespread—they can be found on every continent except Antarctica and are considered a species of low conservation concern. Hopefully, they are a species we can enjoy for many years to come.

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