

**California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System**  
**California Department of Fish and Wildlife**  
**California Interagency Wildlife Task Group**

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WHITE-FACED IBIS

*Plegadis chihi*

Family: THRESKIORNITHIDAE  
B062

Order: PELECANIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The white-faced ibis is an uncommon summer resident in sections of southern California, a rare visitor in the Central Valley, and is more widespread in migration. It prefers to feed in fresh emergent wetland, shallow lacustrine waters, muddy ground of wet meadows, and irrigated or flooded pastures and croplands. Nests in dense, fresh emergent wetland. Formerly more common, especially in the San Joaquin Valley, this species no longer breeds regularly anywhere in California (Remsen 1978). A few pairs bred in 1977 and 1978 at the Salton Sea, and in 1979 at Buena Vista Lagoon, San Diego Co. (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Has nested at Honey Lake (Airola 1980, McCaskie et al. 1979), in the Klamath Basin (Ryder 1967), and at a few isolated areas in Central Valley. At Salton Sea area, fairly common April to September, and uncommon through winter; uncommon transient elsewhere in southern California, and very local winter visitant along coast (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Rare in San Joaquin Valley, occurring mainly near Los Banos, August to April; and rare on northeastern plateau April to September (McCaskie et al. 1979).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Eats earthworms, insects, crustaceans, amphibians, small fishes, and miscellaneous invertebrates. Probes deep in mud with long bill, and also feeds in shallow water or on water surface (Cogswell 1977).

**Cover:** Roosts amidst dense, freshwater emergent vegetation such as bulrushes, cattails, reeds or low shrubs over water (Ryder and Manry 1994). Roosts near or within colony site several days before nesting begins (Alford 1978).

**Reproduction:** Extensive marshes are required for nesting (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Nest, made of dead tules or cattails, is built amidst tall marsh plants, sometimes on mounds of vegetation. According to Cogswell (1977), rarely nests in trees, but it is not clear whether tree nesting has been recorded in California. Grinnell and Miller (1944), Palmer (1962), and Harrison (1978) did not mention tree nesting by this species.

**Water:** Adults observed to drink water (Belknap 1957).

**Pattern:** Prefers to nest in dense marsh vegetation near foraging areas in shallow water or muddy fields.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, diurnal activity.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Distant and local migrant; nonmigratory in some

locations. Absent from northeastern plateau October to March. Winters mainly in San Joaquin Valley and Imperial Valley, but recorded widely as a transient. Population at Salton Sea is reduced sharply from October to March, suggesting a southward migration.

Home Range: Little known outside of breeding range. In Nevada, most birds foraged 3-6 km (some to 18 km) from breeding colony (Bray and Klebenow 1988).

Territory: No information found. Average distance between nests was 2 m (7 ft) in nesting colonies studied by Burger and Miller (1977).

Reproduction: At Los Banos, eggs were present May to July. The 3-5 eggs are incubated for 21 days, mostly by the female, and the young are fed in or near the nest for about 5 wk (Cogswell 1977). No other information on breeding was located, but data on the closely related glossy ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), formerly considered conspecific with this species, probably is similar (Palmer 1962, Harrison 1978).

Niche: Has declined in California and stopped breeding regularly, probably from destruction of extensive marshes required for nesting; a California Species of Special Concern (Remsen 1978). Elsewhere in range, pesticides have caused decline in numbers (Terres 1980).

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