



*Rec. zool. Surv. India* : 104 (Part 1–2) : 179-182, 2005

### ***Short Communication***

## **A SIGHT RECORD OF THE GLOSSY IBIS, *PLEGADIS FALCINELLUS* (LINNAEUS) [THRESKIORNITHIDAE : AVES] FROM CHENNAI, SOUTH INDIA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The avian family Threskiornithidae comprises of 25 species of ibises and 6 species of spoonbills known from the world over (Walters, 1981). Among the ibises, the White Ibis or black headed ibis, *Threskiornis melanocephalus* (Latham), the Indian Black Ibis, *Pseudibis papillosa* (Temminck) and the Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus* (Linnaeus) have so far been recorded from India (Ali and Ripley, 1983; Grimmett *et. al.*, 1999). During a field survey conducted on 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2001, the authors could locate a flock of Glossy Ibises along with a few Median Egrets, *Egretta intermedia* (Wagler) and Black winged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus* (Linnaeus) foraging in the marsh land at Okkium Thorapakkam, a locality adjoining the Pallikaranai swamp, 22 Kms. South of Chennai, Tamilnadu. The flock (Plate-I) comprised of a non-breeding population of about 70 individuals and could easily be identified as belonging to the Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus* by the species characteristics such as brown down curved bill, feathered head, the body with brown and glossy green-blue colour, absence of a white patch near shoulders and wings etc. The plumage colouration, brownish black with a purple and green iridescence, makes the bird appear glossy black from a distance.

In Tamilnadu, The Glossy Ibis has been sighted twice in Vedanthangal Sanctuary, Kancheepuram district (Kannan, 1984; Shiromoney, 1984). However, the present record forms the first report of the species from Chennai Metropolitan area.

The Glossy Ibis is a widely distributed water bird found in temperate and tropical Eurasia to Indonesia and Australia, Africa, Madagascar, West Indies and the Caribbean. Among the Ibis species found in India, Glossy Ibis is the rarest. It is partly resident and nomadic, and partly a winter visitor to southern India. The bird inhabits large lakes, marshes, riverbanks, flooded grasslands, paddy fields, and often-found very locally distributed (Alfred *et. al.*, 2001; Ripley, 1982).

## PLATE I



Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus* (Linnaeus) observed at Chennai.

They are gregarious, usually found in flocks comprising of 40–50 members, and are colonial nesters. They breed in colonies usually in association with egrets and herons. However, this cosmopolitan bird can be described as having no fixed abode nesting to any regular or foreseeable pattern being unpredictable and even more temperamental than other Ibis species (Hancock, 1984). Ripley (1982) has reported several new sightings of the Glossy Ibis, vagrant to Sri Lanka and Maldives Islands. In south India, the bird has been reported in recent years in Kerala from Kannur, Thrissur and Palakkad districts (Sasikumar *et. al.*, 1991; Ravindran, 1993; Praveen and Kumar, 1996), and in Karnataka only from Dharwad (Desai, 1996). The marshland habitats in the vicinity of the Pallikaranai wetland area near Chennai, appears to be an ideal feeding and foraging ground-like one among a few of such important sites found on the Deccan Plateau – for a wide range of water birds including the rare Glossy Ibis. These observations confirm that in recent years the Glossy Ibises tend to colonise suitable habitats in newer sites. Hancock (1984) while studying the water birds of Indonesia, has observed that a few water birds species including the Glossy Ibis appear to have transferred their activities to the less disturbed island of Pulau Rambat off the coast nearer to Jakarta. The recent new sighting records of the bird in south India can be attributed to the nomadic habit of the bird being a will-o'-the-wisp species. However, it maybe worth investigating whether there is any environmental disturbance-taking place in its former ranges. It may be all the more important to study this aspect in Vedanthangal bird sanctuary in Tamilnadu, which is only 86 kms. away from Chennai particularly in view of the current sighting of the Glossy Ibis in Chennai.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors are grateful to the Director, Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata and the Officer-in-Charge, Southern Regional Station, Zoological Survey of India, Chennai for facilities and encouragement. The help of Shri G. Sankaran, photographer, Southern Regional Station, ZSI, Chennai is also gratefully acknowledged.

#### REFERENCES

- Alfred, J. R. B., Kumar, A., Tak, P. C. and Sati, J. P. 2001. Waterbirds of Northern India. *Rec. zool. Surv. India, Occ. Pap.*, **190** : I-xxiv, 1-227. ZSI, Kolkata.
- Ali, S. and Ripley, S. D. 1983. *The Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan* (Compact Edition) Oxford University Press, Delhi 737 pp.
- Desai, R. N. 1996. Rare visits of some ducks, Painted Storks and Glossy Ibis to the tanks of Dharwad (Karnataka : India). *Newsletter for Birdwatcher*, **36**(4) : 78-79.
- Grimmett, C. Inskipp and T. Inskipp 1999. *Pocket Guide to the birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Oxford University Press, London, 383 pp.

- Hancock, J. 1984. *The Birds of the Wetlands*. Oxford University Press, Delhi 152 pp.
- Kannan, R. 1984. The Glossy Ibis in Vedanthangal Heronry. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, **24**(1-2) : 10-11.
- Praveen, J. and Kumar, M. 1996. Glossy Ibis in Palakkad district. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, **36**(1) : 13.
- Ravindran, P. K. 1993. Occurrence of the Glossy Ibis in Kole wetlands, Thrissur district, Kerala. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, **33**(6) : 10.
- Ripley, S. D. 1982. *A synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan*. Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay 652 pp.
- Sasikumar, C., Jayakumar, C. and Jafer, M. 1991. Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus* (Linn.) and Painted Stork, *Mycteria leucocephala* (Pennant) : Two more additions to the Bird list of Kerala. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, **88**(1) : 110.
- Siromoney, G. 1984. Occurrence of Glossy Ibis at Vedanthangal. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. **24**(5-6) : 12-13.
- Walters, M. 1981. *The Complete Birds of the World*. Illustrated Edition. David & Charles, London 367 pp.

G. THIRUMALAI

*Southern Regional Station,  
Zoological Survey of India,  
Chennai-600 028, India*

AND

C. RADHAKRISHNAN

*Western Ghats Field Research Station,  
Zoological Survey of India,  
Calicut-673 002, India*