

BREEDING AND RANGE EXPANSION OF THE WHITE-FACED IBIS IN SASKATCHEWAN AND ALBERTA

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Prairie sightings of the White-faced Ibis were initially made in Manitoba in 1934, in Alberta in 1941 and in Saskatchewan in 1976.³ The species expanded its range across the Canadian prairies in the mid-1970s, with the greatest frequency of observations in Alberta. In the spring and summer of 2006 and 2007, while surveying Franklin's Gull colonies, my field crew and I observed White-faced Ibises at four lakes in Saskatchewan and five lakes in Alberta (Figure 1), with evidence of breeding at all but two locations.

Saskatchewan

The first occurrence record of a White-faced Ibis in Saskatchewan was a single bird on 29 May 1976 east of Stalwart Marsh,⁴ which is located near the town of Stalwart between Highway 2 and Last Mountain Lake. Subsequent observations occurred in the extreme southern part of Saskatchewan,³ at Luck Lake,⁵ at Last Mountain Lake² and at the Quill Lakes (two sightings).³ A pair of adult White-faced Ibises with one young at Old Wives Lake in July 2000 represents the first breeding record for Saskatchewan.¹

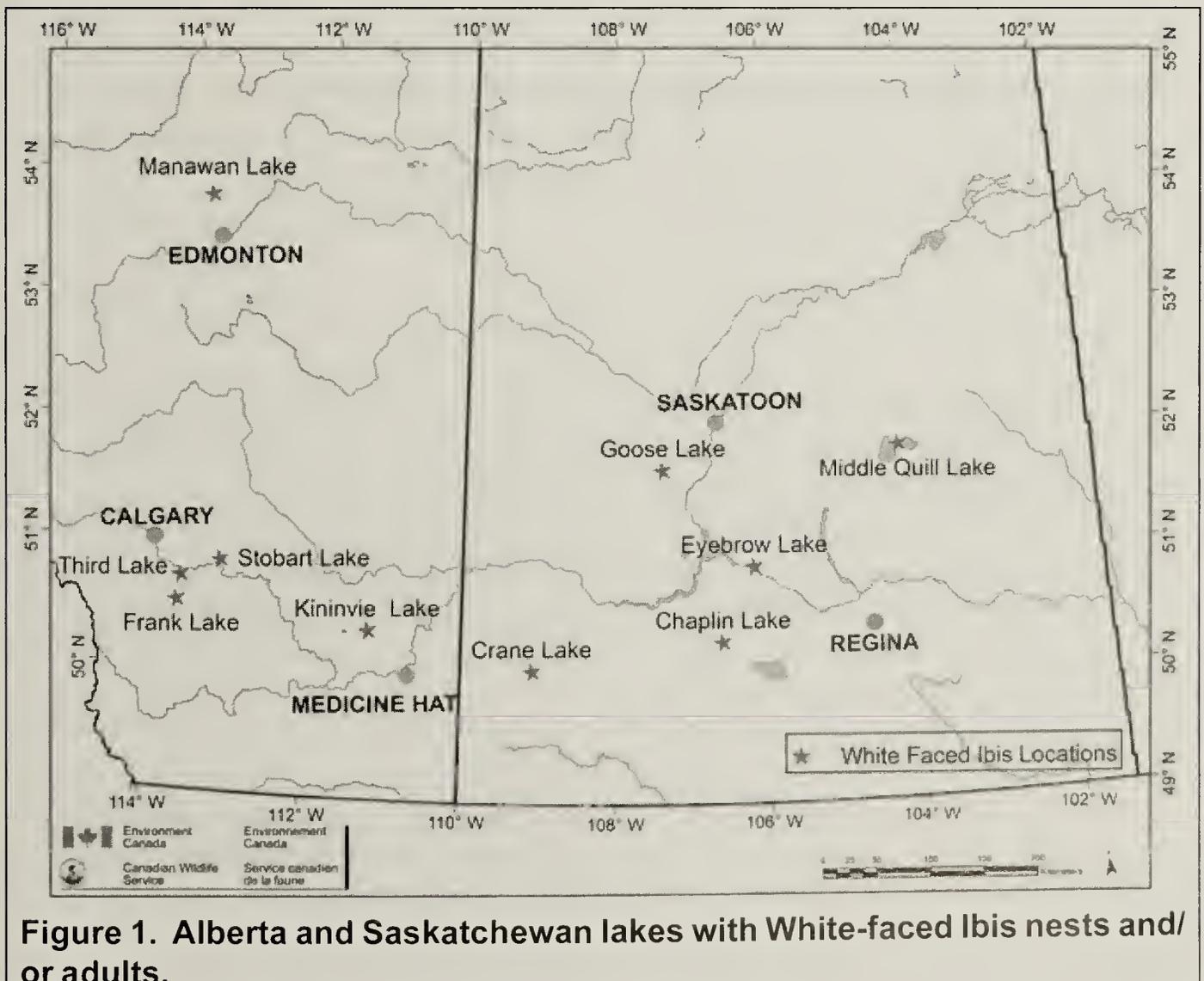


Figure 1. Alberta and Saskatchewan lakes with White-faced Ibis nests and/or adults.



Figure 2. White-faced Ibis nest at Quill Lake, SK Gerry Beyersbergen

2006

During a visit to the Saskatchewan Heritage Marsh complex at the south end of Chaplin Lake on 21 May 2006, I observed two adult White-faced Ibises landing in the residual cattail (*Typha* sp.) beds of the central basin. No attempt was made to search for nesting activity at the site.

On 15 June 2006, two adult White-faced Ibises were roosting on the shore of a bay on the east side of Goose Lake and on 18 July, I saw five White-faced

Ibises in the same general area (Table 1).

During a Franklin's Gull nest count on Middle Quill (Mud) Lake on 14 July 2006, I observed a lone White-faced Ibis flying over a stand of bulrush (*Scirpus* sp.). When I approached the area where the bird was flying, a second adult flushed from a nest containing three young (Figure 2). I observed about 10 Black-crowned Night-Heron nests with eggs and young in the same bulrush bed. The bulrush bed was extremely dense, in 40-50 cm of water, and the majority of the new green vegetation was flattened, presumably by a strong weather event, exposing the nests from above.

2007

Franklin's Gull colony surveys in 2007 resulted in the observation of White-faced Ibises on two additional lakes in Saskatchewan, Crane and Eyebrow, with confirmed nesting on these lakes

Table 1. Observations of White-faced Ibis in Saskatchewan in 2006 and 2007.

Year	Lake	Date	Adults	Nests or young	Comments
2006	Chaplin	21 May	2		Marsh complex - south end
	Goose	15 June	2		East side of lake.
		18 July	5		
	Middle Quill	14 July	2	Nest - 3 young	Bulrush bed
2007	Crane	17 May	5	3 nests (3,4 & 5 eggs)	Possible 4 th nest
	Eyebrow	15 May	4		Potential nest - adult flushed; not located.
		12 July	6	2 nests with young	2 confirmed and one possible nest
	Goose	11 - 12 June	5	Nest?	See Figure 3c photo and text: Sask 2007.
13 - 15 July		2		Nest not relocated.	

and suspected nesting on Goose Lake (Table 1).

The nest on Goose Lake contained two blue eggs (Figure 3c on inside cover). Several adult White-faced Ibises were observed on the lake but not in association with this nest. I examined the photographs, compared the eggs from known nests of Franklin's Gulls and White-faced Ibises (Figure 3) and concluded that it was not a White-faced Ibis nest. In spite of the pale blue colour, I believe the eggs were from a Franklin's Gull because of the shape (pointed end) and the blotching or spotty pattern. White-faced Ibis eggs generally are elliptically ovate, have uniform coloration ranging from pale bluish-green to deep turquoise, and no markings.⁶

Water levels were extremely high in 2007 on Middle Quill Lake. The bulrush bed where the White-faced Ibises had nested in 2006 was completely submerged in May 2007 and no birds were observed in the area. No White-faced Ibises were seen during subsequent visits to the area in 2007 after the water level dropped.

Alberta

The first occurrence record in Alberta of a White-faced Ibis was at Rosebud in 1941, with the next record at Strathmore in 1964. The records from 1974 onwards occurred throughout the southern part of the province.³ The first confirmed nesting of the species occurred at Kininvie on 14 June 1982.³ The White-faced Ibis continues to thrive in Alberta.

2006

On 11 May 2006, my field crew and I observed a minimum of 50 adults in a widely scattered colony in bulrush beds at the north end of Frank Lake and on 11 July found over 11 nests, with young



Figure 4. White-faced Ibis nest at Frank Lake, AB Gerry Beyersbergen

of various ages (Figure 4). On 25 July 2006, Olaf Jensen (Canadian Wildlife Service) and I observed a lone adult White-faced Ibis flying over the cattails on Manawan Lake, about 25 km north of Edmonton.

2007

In 2007, sightings of White-faced Ibis were made at more lakes than in 2006 (Table 2). Frank Lake continued to host a large number of breeding White-faced Ibises and Kininvie Lake had a nesting pair. Surveys of Third and Stobart lakes confirmed nesting of the species at those lakes. On Manawan Lake, a nest with two blue eggs was located and photographs taken of the nest (Figure 3d on inside back cover). In the photograph, the eggs appear blotchy like a Franklin's gull, however when viewed at the nest they were not speckled but had a dirty or stained layer on the egg surface, possibly from interactions with the brooding adult. It may have been the nest of a White-faced Ibis but, with no adults in attendance at the nest at the time of the observation, we are unable to confirm it. The nest site was re-visited in late July, but no flightless young or adults were observed to confirm breeding at this location.

The results of our surveys over the past two years indicate that the White-faced Ibis continues to expand its

Table 2. Observations of White-faced Ibis in Alberta in 2006 and 2007.

Year	Lake	Date	Adults	Nests or young	Comments
2006	Frank	11 May	>50		North basin; bulrush.
		11 July		11 nests with young and eggs	Nests found during nest survey
	Manawan	25 July	1		Flying over cattail.
2007	Frank	8 May	96	Numerous	Nests not visited.
		4 July	123	31 nests	Nests found on transects, represents minimum count.
	Kininvie (Minor)	11 July	7	1 nest (3 eggs)	Nest site – adult flushed.
	Manawan	8 June	-	1 nest (2 eggs)	See Figure 3d photo.
		23 – 25 July	-		No adults or flightless young in the area.
	Stobart	10 July	13	5 Nests* (eggs / young)	*One nest not visited, young flushed.
	Third	9 May	19		Feeding on shoreline of wetland.
5 July		79	5 nests**	More nests off transect but not checked.**	

breeding range in Saskatchewan and Alberta. We have breeding confirmation for three lakes in Saskatchewan with the most northerly at Middle Quill Lake, latitude: 51°56'N. Two additional lakes in Alberta, Stobart and Third, have confirmed breeding records with a northward expansion of the species. The most northerly occurrence record of the White-faced Ibis in Alberta was at Manawan Lake, latitude: 53°54'N, however breeding of the White-faced Ibis at that lake has not been confirmed.

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