

## Red Patch on the Hindneck of Black-Headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh, India

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**Abstract:** New observation record of red patch on Black-Headed Ibis, three different seasons continuously were recorded in Nelapattu bird sanctuary, in Nellore District, Andhra Pradesh, India. My observations especially of the individual with the red spot on the end of the lower mandible gives an additional record of the presence of red colouration other than on hind neck. Significantly individuals of black headed Ibis with red coloured patch on the Hind neck were observed consecutively for three successive seasons. Records of *Threskiornis melanocephalus* with red coloured patches in Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary show our incomplete understanding of the taxonomic description of this species and its distribution. At present there are no clues as to its significance. Attempt to determine if it can be linked with any behaviour, as well as genetic studies that might give a clue to the reason for it.

**Key words:** Black-Headed Ibis • Red Patch • Nelapattu • Andhra Pradesh

### INTRODUCTION

Many wading birds belonging to the Family Ciconiiformes and Pelicaniformes like Ibises, egrets and herons are colonial nesters and show both plumage and bare part colour changes during the breeding season. The colour of the bare skin, including cere, bill and legs, become more vivid [1]. These changes signal a readiness

to breed and are important in species that nest colonially or asynchronously. However, as they tend to last a very short time it is likely that in some cases they remain poorly documented or even unknown [2].

**Observations:** On 29<sup>th</sup> January 2010, during a bird survey in Nelapattu bird sanctuary, (13.92°N - 79.97°E) in Nellore District, Andhra Pradesh, India (Image 1). We observed

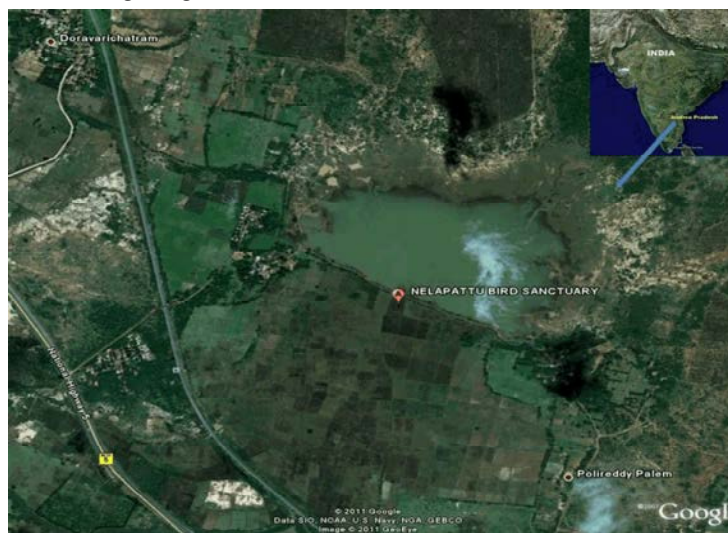


Image 1: Map indicating the Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary (NBS), in Andhra Pradesh, India

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Fig. 1: Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh, India, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2010



Fig. 4: Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh, India, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011



Fig. 2 and 3: Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh, India, 18<sup>th</sup> October 2010



View of Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh

around 412 Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) (*T. melanocephalus*) in the surveyed region. We approached a colony of Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* to have a closer look. On approaching closer (16m) away from tank bund. We observed one individual who had a red-colored patch on its hind neck (Fig. 1). Again during another bird survey in the same area on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2010, we observed 465 individuals of Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, out of which one individual was observed with the red-colored patch again on the hind neck and another individual which was standing just near the former individual on a neighbouring branch, had a small red spot just at the end of the lower mandible (Fig. 2 and 3). Again during another bird survey in same area on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011, we observed 473 individuals of Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, out of which one individual was observed with the red-colored patch again on the hind neck (Fig. 4).

The breeding plumage of Black-headed Ibis is well described in literature [3-6]. This species has a completely unfeathered black head and neck, with blood-red/dark red flushing on the flanks, underwing, legs and feet reported for a brief period at the onset of breeding [1, 7, 8]. However there is no mention of any other red coloration on body parts, during the breeding season [9]. There are few records of mysterious red coloured patches especially on the hind neck of the black headed Ibis [2] and also of scattered red spots on the throat [9].

My observations especially of the individual with the red spot on the end of the lower mandible gives an additional record of the presence of red colouration other than on hind neck. Significantly individuals of black headed Ibis with red coloured patch on the Hind neck were observed consecutively for three successive seasons as described above. As Kannan *et al.* [2] cites some records where they have observed in other members of the same genus like *Threskiornis bernieri* (*T. bernieri*) and *Threskiornis molucca* (*T. molucca*) but not in *T. melanocephalus* at Weltvogelpark Walsrode [9] record a significant observation of recording 20 individuals of black headed out of the 93 pairs they observed.

Records of *Threskiornis melanocephalus* with red coloured patches in Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary show our incomplete understanding of the taxonomic description of this species and its distribution. At present there are no clues as to its significance. It is evidently of interest to look out for it in *T. melanocephalus* and other members of the same genus. Attempt to determine if it can be linked with any behaviour, as well as genetic studies that might give a clue to the reason for it. We recommend that further studies be carried out in the all Wetlands and its surrounding heronries at the earliest possible opportunity to record any presence of red - colored patch on its hind neck and any other part.

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