

Glossy Ibis Spotted at Millennium

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Staff Reporter

Dozens of bird enthusiasts, bird watchers, and nature photographers flocked to the canoe launch at Millennium Park last week to get a glimpse of a unique bird. The glossy ibis, also known as the plegadis falcinellus, foraged in the shallow, muddy waters of the Charles River.

The bird's plumage appears dark brown, almost black, at a distance. But up close, its feathers reveal a rich maroon hue, with the wing coverts shimmering in metallic shades of green, bronze, and violet when caught in the sunlight. They are roughly 20 inches tall with a wingspan of three feet. Another striking feature of the glossy ibis is its long, curved bill. Boston resident and nature photographer Lawrence Connolly captured multiple photos of the striking bird on his Nikon d850. In several shots, the glossy ibis can be seen foraging for aquatic



Birders in the Parkway got a rare treat this past week when a glossy ibis showed up on the shores of the Charles.

PHOTO BY LAWRENCE CONNOLLY

invertebrates in the river's shallow waters, mingling with a white heron and a group of ducks. One photo shows the glossy ibis snacking on a craw-

fish. Connolly posted his photos in the popular Facebook group, "Boston Nature Group." He likes sharing the photos for people who do not have the chance to see the bird in real life.

"It's a rare bird for the park," Connolly explained. "They [glossy ibises] are gregarious and live in flocks. Occasionally, a lone bird gets separated; likely it will fly off soon and find other Glossy ibises to continue its life." They live year round in the West Indies and on the Atlantic coast of southern states, including Florida, Louisiana, Georgia, and South Carolina. Glossy ibises migrate north for breeding season.

"This bird [at Millennium] is a non-breeding adult, based

on the plumage," noted Connolly. "It's a pretty bird, with some iridescent coloring that comes out when the light hits it right. I was lucky to photograph it under ideal conditions in a couple of days. Good light, not that far away, and this bird was pretty unflustered by people being around."

This wading bird can be found on every continent except Antarctica, although they are fairly "new" to the Americas. Until the 1930s, sightings in the United States were rare. (Source: audubon.org/field-guide/bird/glossy-ibis) During the 20th century, the North American population of this bird saw a significant increase, with its range expanding northward.

Although glossy ibises have been spotted in Massachusetts, their appearance in West Roxbury is notable, as it is farther inland than their usual habitats. "Glossy ibis are more commonly seen at the coast, so it's always fun to see one inland. Boston itself doesn't have a lot of ideal habitat for ibis, but they are regularly seen in Squantum and Revere," stated Marj Rines of Mass Audubon.

State Ornithologist Andrew Vitz of MassWildlife noted that the farthest north glossy ibises currently nest is mid-coast Maine, placing Massachusetts at the northern edge of their nesting range.

MassWildlife and its partners conduct a colonial waterbird survey approximately every five years to monitor populations of nesting gulls, cormorants, and wading birds. This includes the glossy ibis. "In 2018, we documented glossy ibises nesting on five islands and totaling an estimated 58 breeding pairs. This summer, we conducted another coastwide survey, but we are

Connolly said that 2024 has been a good year for bird watching, also known as "birding." He has spotted 104 different species of birds in MA this year, and his favorite was the American Flamingo in Cape Cod. "Owls are my favorite. I've had one great sighting of a Barred Owl at Stony Brook Reservation in early June," said Connolly. "I'm just an average birder, and photographer. Once in a while I get lucky in both passes."

West Roxbury resident and avid nature photographer Mary Ellen McMahon has also enjoyed a great birding year. Recently, she captured photos of a tropical brown booby in South Boston. While this seabird is common in the Caribbean, it is rarely seen in the U.S. or Canada. The brown booby has long, pointed yellow-green bill, blue skin around the eyes, pointed wings, and strong yellow webbed feet.

Connolly and McMahon recommended the app Merlin for those interested in bird watching. McMahon also suggested using the app and website eBird. "You can see all the 'hotspots' around and what birds are being seen there. Folks can track what they've seen and post photos and audio," she explained.

McMahon also offered advice for aspiring birders. "I'd recommend they join a bird watching group or just go on a couple of walks with one. They'd gain a lot of information and meet some very knowledgeable folks," she remarked. McMahon recommends the Brookline Bird Club and South Shore Bird Club for those looking to get started.

To learn more about birding in Boston, visit www.mass.gov/info-details/birdwatching-in-boston



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