

## History of Ibis Pond

Ibis Pond was constructed in 1981-82 by refuge staff to create additional freshwater wetlands on the refuge and encourage colonial bird rookery development. By 1985, several species of birds, including cattle, snowy, and great egrets, little blue, and tri-colored herons, were using the rookery; over 150 nests were counted that year.



It was apparent early on that the success of this pond and its associated rookery would be dependent on maintaining a sufficient water level. Changes in rainfall throughout the year directly affected the water level to the point of almost completely drying up at times.

By 1990, Ibis Pond was being used by 8 different species of wading birds, and the number of white ibis nests had peaked to 300. South Carolina DNR conducted a survey that year and determined Ibis Pond to be the largest ibis rookery in the state. In contrast, 1990 also brought fairly severe drought conditions throughout the summer, causing the water level in Ibis Pond to fall 2-3 feet by July. Other ponds on the refuge had virtually dried up and any birds using those pond had abandoned their nests.

In 1995, a well and pump system was installed at Ibis Pond to try and regulate the water level. Drought conditions that persisted well into the 2000s made it nearly impossible, even with continuous pumping, to keep the water level high enough to support the rookery. Low water level allows for increased predation by raccoons and other mammals, as well as increased growth of cattails and other grasses that could quickly take over the pond, making it an undesirable site for nesting.

Over the past several years, increased annual rainfall has lifted the area out of the long-term drought, and the water level at Ibis Pond has improved. That combined with excavation



activities performed by refuge staff to clear out much of the overgrown vegetation has led to the restoration of the Ibis Pond rookery. Eight species of wading birds that historically used the pond have returned and are once again nesting. This spring, two great egrets, which are an endangered species and I have historically been seen on the refuge for nesting and feeding. In late April, refuge staff confirmed that wood storks are, in fact, nesting at Ibis Pond for the first time with 14 nests being counted so far.