

overcome their fear of the water and would actually hit the water head first in a fashion similar to kingfishers and terns. This increased bravery allowed them to catch shad at least four inches below the surface.

It was quite evident that some grackles were more experienced than others at fishing for shad since certain grackles would fly over a fish, hesitate, then retreat and allow a more skilled bird to retrieve it. It was also noticed that even though a certain grackle fished a shad out of the water, this by no means guaranteed that the bird would retain possession of it. In many instances, a bird would catch a fish, begin to fly away, and be pursued immediately by as many as four other grackles whose persistence would cause it to drop the fish. On one occasion, a bird dropped the fish when chased and another bird caught it in mid air and flew away.

It was interesting to note that grackles would not retrieve a dead shad floating on the surface of the water. One dead shad approximately three inches in length was observed for about thirty minutes. During this time, about fifteen different grackles flew to the fish and most of them hovered over it, looked it over, and flew away. A few birds actually grasped it with their bills and immediately dropped it. Finally one bird picked it up and flew to the bank but eventually abandoned it.

All of the grackles observed through binoculars appeared to be the bronze-backed type and their habits could be grouped into two general classes; birds that fished, and birds that pursued the successful fishing birds. This activity indicated that catching fish was a learned trait and not a natural behavior pattern since some of the birds refused to touch the water even though the fish was close to the surface. It was estimated that hundreds of pounds of shad were caught daily from Lake Demopolis by these grackles. It was apparent that these birds discovered a new source of food during a period when most natural foods were scarce and immediately adapted themselves to take advantage of it.

Alabama Department of Conservation
Montgomery, Alabama

CATTLE EGRETS AT MONTGOMERY

Robert W. Skinner

Montgomery can now claim a new breeding bird -- the Cattle Egret. July 13, 1963, five miles south of Montgomery, the author and Bill Summerour, III discovered several pairs of cattle egrets nesting in a colony of little blue herons and American egrets. Several days later five young were banded. July 17, several birds were noted out in the pastures among cattle north, east and south of Montgomery. July 18, 1963, five miles north of Montgomery an adult female was collected by myself to be deposited as a specimen in the State Conservation Department collection. There were eight birds present in the area at the time of collection. The measurements are as follows: Wing, 245; Culmen, 55; Tarsus, 71.5; Tail, 96; Total Length, 480; Weight, 434 gr. The stomach content included the following -- grasshoppers, 72; crickets, 10; frogs, 7 (whole); spider, 1; beetles, 2.

State Department of Conservation
Montgomery, Alabama

SOME OBSERVATIONS OF A NEST OF THE CATTLE EGRET

Julian L. Dusi and Rosemary T. Dusi

In our studies of a wading bird nesting colony located about ten miles southeast of Opp, Covington County, Alabama, on the Covington County Wildlife Management Area, we were fortunate to be able to secure a group of precise observations on a Cattle Egret, Bubulcus ibis (Linnaeus), nest and the development of the young.

The nesting colony, located in a tupelo-oak-pine limestone sink, was shown to us by James E. Keeler in 1962. He had banded nestlings of other wading birds there before and we intensified the study. It was predominantly a Little Blue Heron, Florida caerulea (Linnaeus)- White Ibis, Eudocimus albus (Linnaeus) colony with a few Anhingas, Anhinga anhinga, (Linnaeus) and Common Egrets, Casmerodius albus (Linnaeus), at that time.

Our first trip to the area in 1963 was on March 19. Then, there were about 50 Little Blue Herons and 8 Common Egrets present. Nesting had not been started. Our next visit on May 4, revealed about 60 Little Blue Heron, 20 White Ibis, and 2 Common Egret nests. The young were too small to band. Two adult Cattle Egrets were seen but their nest was not found.

On May 17, accompanied by eight ornithology class members including C.W. Summerour, III and Ann Tyer, we banded a number of herons and located the Cattle Egret nest. The following day the nest was photographed. Of the four eggs present, one had just hatched and another was being pipped. The nest had the appearance of a Little Blue Heron nest and was placed close to several of them.

On June 1, just two weeks after the first bird had hatched, we returned to band and photograph the young. All of the eggs had hatched but only three of the nestlings were large enough to band. They were banded and measured as follows:

- 636-44073. Total length 272 mm., tarsus 55 mm., culmen (exposed) 32 mm.
- 636-44074. Total length 235 mm., tarsus 45 mm., culmen (exposed) 30 mm.
- 636-44075. Total length 230 mm., tarsus 47 mm., culmen (exposed) 30 mm.
- Unbanded Young. Total length 137 mm., tarsus 23 mm., culmen (exposed) 20 mm.

We believe that they hatched in the above order: the first two being the same age, two weeks, the third several days younger and the smallest about one week old.

On June 22, we returned to the area accompanied by C. W. Summerour, III. Three young were present in the tree above the nest. There was no sign of the fourth young. After a treetop chase we managed to catch one of the young which evidently could not fly quite as well as the others. It was 636-44074. We measured him to get his five-week-old dimensions.

Total length 405 mm., tarsus 82 mm., culmen (exposed) 46 mm., culmen anterior to the nostrils 33 mm., wing 200 mm., and extent 785 mm.

The young could easily be confused with those of Little Blue Herons or Snowy Egrets, Leucophoyx thula (Molina), if only casual observations were used because size and general appearance are the same. Color differences when looked for were present. The newly hatched young had pink bills, legs and skin for about the first week. At two weeks of age the feathers were grown well enough to show that the tips of the primaries would be completely white. Little Blue Herons have black-tipped primaries. The bills were black with yellow tips. Little Blue Herons lack the yellow tip and the bill is lighter in the middle and at the base, sometimes being almost flesh color. Snowy Egrets have solid black bills. The Cattle Egret skin was a lime green on the thighs as is that of the Little Blue Heron. The Little Blue Heron tarsus and toes is this same color, whereas that of the Cattle Egret additionally contained a blackish wash on the anterior tarsal surface and the dorsal surface of the toes. The Snowy Egret has the blackish tarsal wash but the toes are green.

At the five-week-old stage, the Cattle Egrets had a darker wash of black on the tarsals and toes. Other features remain much the same. Since observing 636-44074 at this stage, we have not observed these young Cattle Egrets.

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Mr. Bill Summerour, III is doing graduate research work on the Life History of the Cattle Egret in Alabama. He is interested in any records or observations of this species in the State, especially data on distribution and nesting. If you have any such information, Bill would greatly appreciate receiving it at 937 Old Mill Road, Auburn, Alabama.

NOTES

Correction to Cattle Egret Record. The data and measurements of a male cattle egret, collected May 7, 1958 by R. W. Skinner are as follows: Wing, 243; Tarsus, 75; Tail, 84; Culmen, 59; Total Length, 505; Weight, 13 oz.; Testis, L. 8mm.; Rt. 7mm. The stomach contained approximately 90 percent grasshoppers and a few beetles. This bird was collected at Boatyard Lake near Tensaw, Baldwin County, Alabama. It was the third and most northern specimen for the state.

This note is an addition and correction to a previous one contained in Alabama Birdlife, Vol. 6, No. 1-2, page 19. -- Robert W. Skinner

Notes from Livingston, Alabama. On April 21, 1963 I had one of the most delightful bird experiences I have had. While walking down the creek on my farm I noticed a little bird hid behind a limb in a Willow tree overhanging the creek. I was about to pass it up as an Indigo Bunting but decided to examine it with binoculars. All that was visible at

first was the top of the head which was not the Indigo shade of color. Motionless, I waited until the little bird became bold and raised up. Before me was a jewel if ever there was one - violet head and neck, meeting a golden back, green wings, dark red tail, and completely vermillion underneath. I instantly knew I had added to my Sumter County Bird List the most beautiful little bird in the United States, and one of the rarest - The Painted Bunting. For an hour there followed one of the best exhibitions I have ever experienced. The bird ignored me completely and began to feed among the Willow blossoms. It would hang up side down, hover over the foliage to pull out a worm and fly to a limb to devour it, fly almost down to my feet to eat the seed of the native blue grass, and at one time perched in the top of the Willow and gave his "whisper song." The song was higher pitched and more delicate than the song of the Indigo Bunting and had considerably more pattern to it. After about an hour this bird was joined by another male Painted Bunting which I only glimpsed and the two flew away.

On April 30, 1963 I was able to add to my Sumter County List what is considered by many the second most beautiful water bird in the United States, for on that day a Purple Gallinule with a wounded wing landed on my pond. He is still there and probably will be the rest of his life as the left wing is about completely gone. He could not have picked a better place to spend the rest of his days as I have planted there dozens of species of aquatic plants, including water lilies. He presents a beautiful picture walking on the lily pads among the blossoms as he feeds on the insects, snails, etc. which abound in such habitat.

On April 28, 1963 I saw for the first time in my life at Eutaw, Alabama, a flock of about fifteen Tree Swallows. At the same place and time I saw Shovelers, Baldpates and Blue-Winged Teal, and at the same place I saw, on May 3rd, one lone Ruddy Duck. This seems unusually late for all except the Blue-Winged Teal, which I have seen in Sumter County as late as June. Jenkins Jackson, Livingston, Alabama.

Summer Observations From the Decatur Area. The following are observations of summer residents of the Decatur area, 1963. Those birds marked (N) were seen at the nest or with young.

Seen near 2206 Eleventh Street, Southeast, from June 4 to July 19, were: Brown Thrasher (N), Starling (N), House Sparrow (N), Robin (N), Bluejay (N), Orchard Oriole (N), Cardinal (N), Rufous-Sided Towhee, Downy Woodpecker, Mockingbird, Common Grackle, Purple Martin (N), Mourning Dove and Eastern Kingbird.

At the East end of Finley Island were seen the following, during the same period: Crested Flycatcher (N), Rufous-sided Towhee, Summer Tanager, Orchard Oriole, Cardinal, Bluejay, Common Grackle, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Brown Thrasher, Bobwhite, Wood Thrush, Robin, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, and Carolina Wren (N).

Red-headed Woodpeckers and Nighthawks were seen in other parts of the city. Barbara C. Flindt, Decatur, Alabama