

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

The fall of 1964 has been one of the most unforgettable autumns that I can remember. It has been marked by scant rainfall and unseasonable temperatures, along with a beautiful array of fall color. Our Society held its Fall meeting in Birmingham, where the members enjoyed field activities and fellowship in a region that is consistently known for its good birding. Oak Mountain, Cahaba Valley and Lake Purdy provided much enjoyment and diversified scenery for us all. Our entire weekend was additionally complemented by the graciousness of our hosts, THE BIRMINGHAM AUDUBON SOCIETY. We look forward to having another meeting in this part of the state.

One need not put away the binoculars and field guide after the last fall migrants have been observed, for we are coming to one of the best activity periods of the year --- THE CHRISTMAS COUNT. This endeavor is sponsored by the National Audubon Society. The purpose of the Christmas Counts is to determine the winter bird population within a given circular area. These counts are registered with the National Audubon Society and the results published each year. These censuses are of particular value because they are made in the same locality at the same time of the year over a long period of time. The accumulation of this type of data is valuable because it can be used as an index to predict changes in our bird populations.

Here in Alabama we have three well-established count areas -- Auburn, Birmingham and Mobile. Each of these count areas is divided into sections, and each section is assigned to a party leader by the compiler of the particular count area. The party leader and members of his party are responsible for tallying the number and species of birds observed in their region during the day which usually begins before dawn and ends after dark. It is a rather strenuous occasion, for efforts are made to bird as many different habitats as possible in order to increase the number of birds observed. Enthusiasm and anticipation mount as each party attempts to beat last year's species count record.

It is hoped that other members in the state will initiate a Christmas Bird Count for their own area this year. Alabama is a large state, and it would be desirable to have several additional count areas set up where there are enough competent birders to carry out a census. I am quite sure that the birders in Auburn, Birmingham, and Mobile would welcome interested people to take part in their own censuses. This would be an excellent opportunity for the visitors to find out what is involved in the establishment of Christmas Counts. Additional information regarding the formation of Christmas Counts may be secured through the officers of AOS or by writing directly to the National Audubon Society. Moreover, I would like to encourage the membership to help in as many of the different Christmas Counts as possible. Here one not only has the opportunity to enjoy good birding in various parts of the state during the winter but also has the opportunity to meet new people and to renew old acquaintances.

Let me take this opportunity to wish you a Happy Holiday Season, and to ask you to help make our Society a better and stronger one for next year. Participate in our activities and be responsible for adding at least one new member to our roles for next year.

THE CATTLE EGRET, BULBULCUS IBIS IBIS, IN ALABAMA

CHARLES W. SUMMEROUR

A preliminary study on the status, distribution and habits of the Cattle Egret in Alabama was conducted under the supervision of Dr. Julian Dusi, professor of zoology, Auburn University, from May, 1963, to May, 1964.

This study combined the efforts and knowledge of many people and the author wishes to express his gratitude especially to those AOS members who so willingly assisted him. These members shared with the author a personal interest in the study and it is hoped that the findings in this report will add to their enjoyment of the avifauna of Alabama.

The study was not intended to concentrate on a limited phase of the biology of the Cattle Egret. Rather, an attempt was made to gather as much information about the status and life history of this species in Alabama as possible, so that the data obtained might serve as a stepping stone for more limited areas of research in the future.

History of the Cattle Egret

Until the turn of the century, the Cattle Egret was indigenous to the warmer climates of the Old World where it was widespread and well known in southern Spain and Portugal, all of Africa except the Sahara Desert, and the warmer parts of Asia. Two known subspecies exist: The African Cattle Egret, Bulbulbus ibis ibis (Linnaeus), and B.i. coromandus (Boddaert), the Asian race. A third variant of the Seychelles off the east coast of Africa, has not been positively established as a subspecies.

It is not definitely known when and where the Cattle Egret invaded the New World but the earliest records indicate that it first appeared in Surinam, South America, between 1877 and 1882 and British Guiana between 1911 and 1912 (Palmer 1962:441). The first authenticated record for the new world was a specimen collected by Blake (1939) in British Guiana on May 27, 1937, and the species was first recorded in North America by Willard E. Dillee near Clewiston, Florida, in the summer of 1941 or 1942 (Palmer loc. cit.).

Dean (1957) gave a brief history of the Cattle Egret in the New World and explained that the bird had been seen from Florida to Texas and north to Newfoundland. Keeler (1957) reported collecting the first Cattle Egret seen and identified in Alabama on November 8, 1957. He wrote that the bird was first observed "standing about five feet from the edge of the pavement at the mouth of Chocalata Bay, two miles east of the drawbridge on the Mobile causeway in Baldwin County." The specimen was placed in the zoological collection at the University of Alabama.

On April 26, 1958, two Cattle Egrets were seen on Dauphin Island by Lovett E. Williams and Dan W. Speake. One of these was collected by Speake for the Alabama Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit collection. A third specimen was collected by Skinner (1958) at Boatyard Lake, Baldwin