

fly back and forth between their nesting grounds and their feeding grounds every day.

I arrived at the rookery during the middle of the afternoon and stayed until dark so that I could see the birds returning to their nests to feed their young and then go to roost for the night. As I approached I could see the large birds flying in all directions around the cedar grove. Some were coming in to feed their young and some were returning to their feeding grounds.

In the grove there were literally hundreds of nests in the cedar trees. Some nests were low enough in the trees so that you could look into them without climbing at all while others were higher up and some were in the very tops of the trees. Each tree contained several nests.

I noticed two things almost immediately. One was the horrible, almost overwhelming stench that pervaded the whole area. The herons feed, and feed their young, on small fish, crayfish, frogs and even small water snakes. The ground under the trees was littered with bits of flesh from their food and these bits were in varying stages of decomposition. The odor was almost overpowering at first but I soon began to grow accustomed to it.

The other thing that I noticed was that the birds were not all of the same kind but that there were several different kinds of herons nesting here. I finally recognized, after some consultation with the bird guide book, that there were Snowy Egret, American Egret, and Little Blue Herons all nesting together here. This was surprising to me too. I had expected that only one kind of heron would be found nesting in a particular rookery.

There were young birds in all stages of development in the rookery too. Some of the nests contained eggs or newly hatched chicks while the young in other nests were almost full grown.

As it grew later more and more of the adult birds began to return to their nests. They came from all directions. They came singly and by twos, threes, fours. As darkness approached the returning groups seemed to increase in size until finally all of the birds were in just before dark.

At dark I left the rookery with the feeling that I had been given the privilege of witnessing one of the rare sights of nature.

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NORTHERN ALABAMA NOTES ON THE CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

Look on a map of central Asia and you will find the Caspian Sea, a briny inland sea bordered on the south by Iran, on the west by the Ukraine, and surrounded in parts by the Caucasian Mountains. The Volga river empties into it. This sea has its name given to one of our birds, the Caspian Tern. This cosmopolitan fellow ranges over Europe, Asia, and North America. One of our largest terns, he is nearly the size of the Herring Gull, with a black cap, a bright red bill, and a shallowly forked tail.

In North America he breeds along the shores of Canada's Gulf of St. Lawrence, locally around the Great Lakes, and, rarely, on the South Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, and winters from there south. While Howell's Birds of Alabama and Oberholser's, The Bird Life of Louisiana, give no inland records, Caspian Terns arrive each fall on the Wheeler Reservoir of Northern Alabama with almost clocklike regularity and remain for a few weeks until colder weather drives them to the Gulf.

The odd factor, where the northern Alabama records are concerned, is that for the past four years, the arrival dates for these birds have varied only from August 23 to September 2, and that the first arrivals are always noted on the same spot, a remote gravel bar in the reservoir northwest of Decatur. Four or 5 individuals make up the first flock each fall but numbers increase until, in mid September, 15 or 20 of these birds are using the Decatur locality. These remain until early October and the latest known record for occurrence is November 1, when only a single bird was seen.

While a few records have been made on the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge covering the middle third of Wheeler Reservoir, the majority of the sight records have come from the vast stretch of open back water lying north and west of Decatur. Here, they have been observed feeding on schools of small shad. Evidently, these birds are purely transients, pausing to rest and feed during fall migration. Despite a diligent watch, they have never been noted on Wheeler Reservoir in spring. Since they do occur regularly in northern Alabama from late August to early November, they should occur on other large inland bodies of water in Alabama during the same period. A careful watch may turn up other interesting records for the state.—Thomas Z. Atkeson, Box 1643, Decatur, Ala., and David C. Hulse, 619 Moulton St., E., Decatur, Ala.