

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.