

HERONS USE OF FORMER COLONY SITES

Julian L. Dusi and Rosemary D. Dusi

There is little in the literature regarding the return of heron colonies to previously occupied sites that have not been used for a number of years. We have been studying the heron colonies in Alabama, since 1952, and have good data on many of the sites that have been occupied (Dusi and Dusi 1988).

The first heron colony we observed was at the Hog Wallow Ponds Site, 10 km south of Tuskegee, Macon Co., in 1952 (Dusi 1958). It was a Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) colony and this colony site was actively used until 1958, when the birds were shot and dispersed.

The same year that the herons of the Hog Wallow Ponds were shot, a new Little Blue Heron colony appeared on a pond site about one km south of Marvyn, Lee Co. and was there for 1958 and 1959.

A new colony was found in the pine woods, adjacent to the Tuskegee Holiday Inn, on 9 June 1970 (Dusi 1977). It started as a Little Blue Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*), and Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) colony and gradually changed into mostly Cattle Egrets. This colony grew until most of the trees in the site were killed, then it finally moved in 1978. It is believed that this same group of Cattle Egrets moved to several sites in Tuskegee because they were all upland colony sites. In 1977 a group was found at a site on Motley Road in northwest Tuskegee. In 1979, the colony site was on Colbert Road. It returned there in 1980, but was harassed and caused to move. A group occupied the Seigrist Site, about 16 km southwest of Tuskegee, in 1980. In 1981, a group attempted to nest at the Judkins Site, about one km west of the Colbert Road Site, in Tuskegee, but it was harassed and caused to leave.

After this eviction, no colony was found in the Tuskegee area until 1991. Then, a swamp-colony containing mostly Cattle Egrets appeared at the Hog Wallow Ponds Site. This return to the Hog Wallow Ponds Site was 33 years after the Little Blue Heron colony was caused to move in 1958.

Our other records of a colony returning to the same site was the colony site (South Uniontown Site) about three km south of Uniontown, on the Marengo-Perry county line. The colony first appeared on this site in 1964 and was active until 1970. It left and appeared here again from 1976 to 1978, then moved. Its last appearance here was from 1983 to 1986, when it moved to Faunsdale. In this case the colony shifted sites from around Faunsdale to Uniontown, but a colony was always at some site, within 20 km of the South Uniontown Colony Site, from 1959 to 1992.

The Hog Wallow Pond Colony return represents an entirely different population returning to the site. Little Blue Herons initially occupied the site, before Cattle Egrets were in Alabama. The current colony may have been started by Little Blue Herons but is now mostly Cattle Egrets. There is little chance that any of these Little Blue Herons would be old enough to be from the initial Little Blue Heron group that was at the Hog Wallow Ponds. The number of suitable sites in the Tuskegee area is almost unlimited, so the herons had many sites from which to choose.

The Uniontown Colony group was a mixed species group which has, through the years, moved among the available sites in the Uniontown-Faundale areas. The number of suitable sites is limited and so rotation through the available sites would result in periodic returns to each site.

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

Literature Cited

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BLACK SKIMMER (*RYNCHOPS NIGRA*) IN AUBURN

Julian L. Dusi

An immature Black Skimmer, *Rynchops nigra*, was found in a yard at Auburn, Lee Co., Alabama, on 28 August 1992. It had a broken wing and was taken to the Opelika Animal Hospital where it died. Veterinarian assistant, Kim Rasmussen, brought it to me for museum preparation. The specimen will be placed in the Auburn University Vertebrate Museum.

Apparently the bird was misplaced this far inland by Hurricane Andrew and flew into an object, breaking its wing. – **Julian L. Dusi**, Professor Emeritus, Department of Zoology and Wildlife Science, Auburn University, AL 36849

1991-92 FALL AND WINTER SIGHTINGS

Greg D. Jackson

Birders in our area had plenty of excitement last fall and winter. Birding was generally good through the autumn migration, and winter birding inland was excellent. Many rarities were discovered, including two first and two second Alabama records. Mild temperatures prevailed through most of the period, and precipitation was slightly lower than expected. An unusual event was the seven inches of snow that fell at Birmingham 18 January! Cold fronts passed through this autumn on 19 and 25 September; 5, 15, and 20 October; and 1, 18, 20-21, and 23 November.

This report covers the period from August 1991 through February 1992 in Alabama and the Florida Panhandle (east to the Apalachicola River). The appearance of observations in this column does not suggest verification or acceptance of records for very rare species, as these must be considered by the appropriate state records committees. It is important that all submissions for birds that are rare, either in general or for a particular season or region, be accompanied by adequate details of the observation. The extent of this documentation depends on the rarity of the species and the difficulty of identification. Reports should always describe the conditions of observation and the diagnostic characters observed. Your help in