

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

A CLASSICAL EXAMPLE OF THE CATTLE EGRET (*BUBULCUS IBIS*)

PIRATING LITTLE BLUE HERON (*EGRETTA CAERULEA*) NESTS IN ALABAMA

Julian L. Dusi and Rosemary D. Dusi

The Cattle Egret, (*Bubulcus ibis*), has been observed pirating Little Blue Heron, (*Egretta caerulea*), nests at several colony sites in Alabama (Dusi 1968; McKittrick 1975).

In Alabama, Cattle Egrets arrive in colony sites later than Little Blue Herons. Little Blue Herons already have nests built and some eggs laid, or hatched, when Cattle Egrets arrive. Piracy occurs when a large group of Cattle Egrets in breeding condition comes into a Little Blue Heron nesting colony. Instead of building their own nests in the remaining less choice sites, the Cattle Egrets pirate, or take-over, Little Blue Heron nests. If the Little Blue Herons are still egg-laying, the egrets wait until Little Blue Herons leave their nests and then occupy the nests. The Little Blue Herons are not aggressive enough to force the Cattle Egrets to leave. When young Little Blue Herons are present in a nest, the Cattle Egrets pick the young birds and force them from the nest and then occupy the nest (Dusi 1968; McKittrick 1975). This pattern of nest piracy does not appear to be typical of all Cattle Egret/Little Blue Heron colonies. Weise (1976) and Parsons (1995) reported Cattle Egrets and Little Blue Herons nesting in the Pea Patch Colony in Delaware, with no piracy activity.

In Alabama, the Cattle Egret has been observed taking-over Little Blue Heron nests at several colony sites: Pansey colony site, Houston County,

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Tuskegee colony site, Macon County, and most recently the Fort Deposit colony site, Lowndes County (Dusi 1968; McKittrick 1975).

The Fort Deposit colony site, discovered by Fred Bassett, had been occupied by Cattle Egrets in 1994. On 22 May 1995, he called to tell us that he had just returned from the colony site and was surprised at seeing 27 Little Blue Heron nests and only about four Cattle Egrets (not nesting) present. The next day (23 May) we drove to the site to photograph this rare Little Blue Heron colony. Instead, we found about 30 Cattle Egret nests, with about 40 Cattle Egrets present. Only ten Little Blue Heron nests remained. One nest contained two Cattle Egrets sitting, with two Little Blue Herons standing adjacent to the nest, making no attempts to reclaim it. Other Little Blue Herons were standing by other apparently recently pirated nests occupied by Cattle Egrets.

On 9 June 1995, we returned to the Fort Deposit colony site to find 106 Cattle Egret nests in incubation stages and three Little Blue Heron nests, with large young ready to leave the colony site.

This is a classical example of how a Little Blue Heron colony can be pirated and become a Cattle Egret colony in a 24-hour period. This also may explain decreasing numbers of the Little Blue Heron in Alabama. **Julian L. Dusi**, Department of Zoology and Wildlife Science, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849 and **Rosemary D. Dusi**, 560 Sherwood Dr., Auburn, AL 36849

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POSSIBLE COOPERATIVE PREY CAPTURE IN THE GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER (MYIARCHIS CRINITIS)

George W. Folkerts

Cases in which birds cooperate to capture prey are rare. The classical example is that of the extinct New Zealand Huia (Heteralocha acutirostris), in which the chisel-like beak of the male was used to expose grubs which were extracted by the thinner curved beak of the female (Soper 1972).