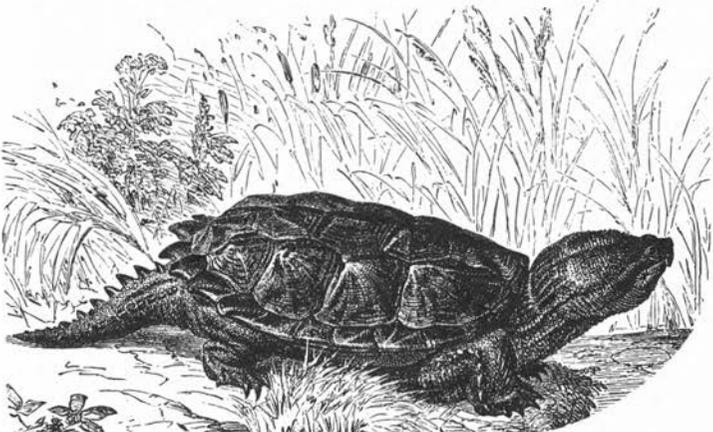


BEHAVIOR NOTES

by George W. Gove

In the late summer and fall, Snowy Egrets, mostly immatures, come in to the lagoon at Horn Pond, Woburn, to feed. While walking around the lagoon one evening, my attention was drawn to six or eight snowys feeding along the edge. When I looked at them with my binoculars, I noted that one of them was in deeper water than I would normally expect; in fact, it was up to its belly in the water which seemed to me unusual since I had never seen an egret in water much more than ankle (Snowy Egret "ankle") deep. I watched the egret as it went deeper and deeper into the water until eventually only its neck and head were out of water. It had not tried to get out but had only stared down at the water as it went in. Finally it went completely under, not to reappear again. Never having witnessed such a thing and knowing that Snowy Egrets are not diving birds, it eventually occurred to me what probably had happened. I have seen a lot of snapping turtles at Horn Pond and have seen a few ducks become meals for them. By simple deductive reasoning, I assume the egret had stepped too close to the vise-grip jaws of a snapper and was pulled under and made a meal of by an opportunistic turtle.

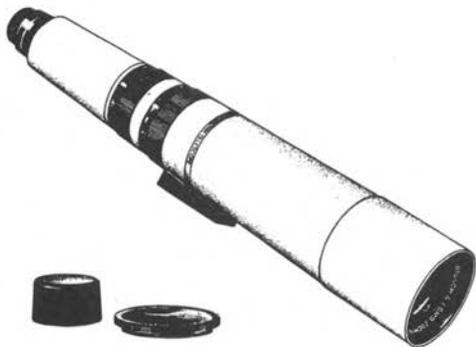
A Northern Phalarope at Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, one of two present, fared better in the same circumstances, perhaps. I was watching two birds feeding on a crust of dried algae when one of them went under water and popped up again, at which point it tried to run and fly away but was apparently securely anchored to the crust. The bird struggled and attempted to fly without success for several minutes. Finally with great effort, it pulled itself away from whatever was holding it and flew off several yards, then alighted and started preening. However, it did not come out of the struggle completely unscathed as it now had one foot where previous to the struggle it had had two. I suspect that it too was the victim of a snapping turtle, perhaps a small one.



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