

1978 CENSUS OF HERON AND IBIS NESTS AT CLARK'S ISLAND,
PLYMOUTH, MASSACHUSETTS

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The Clark's Island Heronry in Plymouth has been studied since 1975 by personnel of the Manomet Bird Observatory, and was last censused in 1975 (1). This summer we monitored the nesting success of herons and ibises in selected areas and censused the remainder of the island on June 6th. The counts of active nests for 1975 and 1978 are presented below. The figures for both years include nesting data from the study areas plus the census data for the remainder of the island and represent our best estimate for total numbers of active nests on the census date.

	Active nests	1976	1978
Black-crowned Night Heron		350	200
Snowy Egret		150	231
Glossy Ibis		40	20
Little Blue Heron		5	1+*
Great Egret		5	10
Cattle Egret		0	1?*
Unclassified		<u>0</u>	<u>16</u>
Total		550	478 *see text

A comparison of the nest figures indicated an overall stability of the total breeding population, but the relative abundance of the Snowy Egrets and Black-crowned Night Herons are notably different. The numbers for Little Blue Herons and Cattle Egrets are not accurate owing to imprecise identification of eggs and young of these species which are similar to those of Snowy Egrets. Moreover, adults were rarely observed on nests since the nesting areas were in dense foliage, and because we intentionally made sufficient noise on our approach to encourage early and careful withdrawal of the adults rather than the chick-and-egg scattering panics which can accompany surprise. Only one Little Blue Heron nest was identified. No more than one adult Cattle Egret was observed at one time in 1978. However, the fact that one bird lingered near a nesting tree, even while we worked in the area, suggests that there may have been at least one active Cattle Egret nest. At least three Cattle Egret nests were identified in 1977.

Nesting success for the 201 nests studied have not been analyzed, but a cursory examination suggests that the success rates are not substantially different from those reported for Snowy Egrets and Black-crowned Night Herons in 1975 when between two and three young per nest were raised to an age of at least 10 days.

There has been a gradual shift in the areas of highest nest density towards the north end of the island, and, as well, a shift of the tree species chosen for nesting sites. Although the Black-crowned Night Herons still preferred to nest in eastern red cedars, the Snowy Egrets, which had preferred deciduous bush nests in 1975 (1), now overwhelmingly selected cedars for nest sites. Over 200 of the Snowy Egret nests were

in cedars. In addition, there was a marked shift in the nest site preference among Glossy Ibises. In 1975 they nested only in deciduous bushes (1) while this year all but one nested in cedars. The Great Egrets followed a similar pattern, with the 1975 preference for high bush blueberry (1) altered to an exclusive preference this year for the exposed tops of pitch and white pines. These changes in nest site selection may reflect a general shift in the heronry from a shrubby area to an area characterized by fewer shrubs and more cedars, pines and cherries.

The factors which limit the size of this heron colony remain obscure and represent an important area for future investigation.

References

- (1) Harrington, Brian, 1975. "1975 Census of Waders at Clark's Island," Bird Observer of Eastern Massachusetts, Vol. 3, no. 5, Sept.-Oct., p. 167.

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Each TASL field trip is led by someone familiar with a particular habitat or other facet of bird life. The first trip distributed birders around the perimeter of Boston Harbor, where we observed winter waterfowl movements. This was instructive for many participants, most of whom had never before observed such activity on a coordinated basis. We also enjoyed the discovery of a Harlequin Duck, and a flock of Red-necked Grebes, several of which were observed courting close to shore. Observers then gathered at Soheil Zendehe's to pool counts and discuss what had been observed, benefitting greatly from the accumulated experience of Soheil, Craig Jackson, and Dave Brown.

Our next two TASL trips will study wading and shorebirds of local salt marshes. Soheil Zendehe will introduce you to the birds of Belle Isle Marsh in East Boston on August 5, and Dave Brown will lead a study of shorebirds in Squantum on August 26. Both sites can be reached by MBTA, and are a relatively short drive from the Rte. 128 perimeter. As participation is limited, anyone who is interested in one of the field trips should contact the leader in advance. Leaders will provide exact details as to meeting time and locations, and can preview what they expect to observe. Car pooling can be arranged.

August 5	"Wading and Shorebirds in a Local Salt Marsh"	Belle Isle Marsh	Soheil Zendehe (628-8990)
August 26	"Fulfillment of Resting and Feeding Requirements of Shorebirds with respect to tides in South Boston"	Squantum	Dave Brown (328-3553)