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THE ABERDEEN BAY HERON COLONY
By Bruce Adams and John Miller

North of Atlantic City, New Jersey, in Absecon Bay, at grid coordinates 39°2'-0962, lies a large heron and this breeding colony which, in New Jersey, is probably second in size only to the famous Stone Harbor colony in Cape May County. The authors have been banding herons and this in this colony for 11 years, and some interesting statistics on populations and recoveries have resulted. This paper will summarize some of the year-to-year population trends and recoveries resulting from our banding at the colony.

The breeding area is largely concentrated on two islands, each about 15 acres in area. The outer edges of the islands consist mainly of fields and mud flats, and the center portion, where the herons nest, is a dense, tangled mass of shrubbery and pterogales, with hayberry, Nording Glory Vine, Nolbbery, Tokeberry, and some Polson Ivy being the principal types of foliage. What is of particular significance regarding the foliage is the fact that there is virtually none more than seven feet in height. All of the herons of all species nest either on, or very close to the ground. This includes such species as the Black-crowned Night Heron which often nests high in trees. Also unusual is the fact that the different species nest in very close proximity to each other; i.e., a Louisiana Heron may nest only a few feet from a Little Blue Heron.

Banding the baby herons consists mainly of concentrating on those birds about three weeks old or older, which have left the nest but are not yet capable of sustained flight. This requires a somewhat strenuous and exhausting effort on the part of the bander as the birds can be difficult to catch when running through the thick underbrush. In some cases, however, they will remain quiet and in the immediate vicinity of the nest and can be picked up, banded, and put back where they were. Unlike gulls, terns, and many other water birds, the adults make very little protest at our presence. They usually just fly off a short distance away, settle down, and return to the area when we have finished.

Identification of young herons and egrets can be quite tricky at first, as several species are similar in appearance, but some one is familiar with the basic field marks it poses little problem. For further information on identification of young herons see John Miller's article, appearing in EBBA News, 36(1): 1973.

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There is also a certain amount of variation in numbers of each species banded each year, as summarized (Table 1). To a certain degree these totals may represent timing in our visits to the colony; i.e., if we happen to arrive