

GENERAL NOTES

American Egrets Observed from a Hudson River Steamer.—Since the late summer of 1937 when the American Egret (*Casmerodius albus egretta*) apparently reached the peak of its abundance in the Albany, New York region, we have been interested in the local status of this striking bird during the post-breeding season. While our observation dates are fairly uniformly distributed throughout late summer and early autumn, our longest and most satisfactory single period occurred on August 27, 1940.

In an effort to ascertain more precisely the number of egrets along the upper Hudson River, Mrs. Stoner and I engaged passage on the largest passenger steamer regularly plying between Albany and New York City. However, our voyage included only that part of the river between Albany and Kingston Point, a distance of 48 miles. The outward trip began with departure from Albany at 9:20 A.M. and ended at 1:20 P.M. on an incoming tide which reached its height about noon. The return trip from Kingston began at 2:20 P.M. and ended at 6:20 P.M. on an outgoing tide which was lowest upon arrival in Albany. The day was partly cloudy and a light southerly wind prevailed. Temperature at start 65°F.; barometer 30.15". All observations were made from the upper deck of the vessel, approximately 30 feet above the water. The average speed of the boat was about 15 miles an hour with stops *en route* at Hudson, Catskill, and Saugerties.

On the trip down river 45 American Egrets were noted at 14 different points between Cossackie and Saugerties, a distance of approximately 20 miles. The birds were not seen north of the former nor south of the latter town. Single individuals were noted at 5 points; the largest group consisted of 8 individuals; other aggregations comprised one group of 7 and two groups of 5 and 4 individuals, respectively. Thirteen of the birds were on the east side of the river, 32 on the west side.

The greatest concentration of egrets occurred in the vicinity of Hudson and Catskill. It is here also that the most extensive, shallow, reedy flats occur. At low tide they are more or less exposed and offer favorable feeding grounds for these herons and their allies. A few of the egrets were perched in trees at the water's edge but most were standing in the shallows among the rushes. Boat traffic on the river gave them no concern. At Catskill one bird unconcernedly preened itself a few yards from a man working on a garbage dump.

On the trip up-river from Kingston Point to Albany, 93 American Egrets were noted at 15 different places between a mud flat three miles south of Saugerties and the village of Stuyvesant, a distance of approximately 25 miles. Egrets were not observed south of the former nor north of the latter observation points. Single individuals were noted at only two places; the largest group consisted of 15 individuals; other aggregations comprised single groups of 14, 12 and 10 individuals, two groups of 9 each, a group of 8, two groups of 3 each and four groups of 2 each. Seventy-nine of the birds were on the east side of the river, 14 on the west side.

As on the morning trip, the greatest concentration of egrets occurred in the Hudson-Catskill area; less than one-third of the observed population occurred outside those limits. It will be noted also that the gregarious tendencies of these birds are maintained even in their post-season wanderings. In only seven instances were single individuals observed, while in 16 instances three or more egrets were resting or feeding in close proximity to one another.

In all probability at least some of the American Egrets observed by us on the morning and afternoon trips were duplicates; just how many fall in this category it is, of course, impossible to state. However, we believe that we are within the limits of conservatism in stating that well over 100 different individuals were observed by us during the course of the day.

A brief summary of our observations on the American Egret in the Albany region, 1937 through 1940, may now be appropriate. Each season begins with the date on which the first individual was noted and closes with the last date on which the species was recorded: August 1 to October 12, 1937, 16 observation periods totaling $28\frac{1}{2}$ hours, 112 individuals; August 10 to October 14, 1938, 14 observation periods embracing $16\frac{1}{2}$ hours, 51 individuals; July 30 to September 16, 1939, 13 observation periods covering 9 hours, 58 individuals; and July 19 to October 9, 1940, 15 observation periods comprising $23\frac{1}{2}$ observation hours, 234 individuals.

We believe that the data here presented together with other information at hand provide sufficient evidence to warrant the following conclusions. First, while the numbers of the American Egret in eastern New York fluctuate somewhat from season to season, a general increase in the abundance of post-breeding individuals has become evident in recent years. Second, the main flyway from which dispersal occurs in the "Capital District" (roughly, the district within a 25-mile radius of Albany) is the Hudson River. The basis for this statement lies in the fact that the egrets in that territory first appear on the lower reaches of the Hudson; later a few are found along the Mohawk River and in other streams and ponds in the vicinity. However, dispersal of the birds into the surrounding territory was less marked in 1940 than in the three preceding seasons. Third, a definite concentration point occurs in the Hudson-Catskill area where extensive mud flats suitable as feeding grounds are exposed at low tide; bordering swampy woodlands offer attractive resting and roosting places.

In view of this combination of favorable circumstances we should not be surprised to find or to learn of a nesting of this fine heron along the lower Hudson in the not too distant future.—DAYTON STONER, *New York State Museum, Albany, New York.*

The Ring-necked Duck in Southeastern Alaska.—The morning of February, 27, 1940, at Petersburg, Southeastern Alaska, I saw four female Ring-necked Ducks (*Nyroca collaris*) at a distance of about ten yards. The lack of white on the wings was plain, even without glasses; four-power field-glasses made the light ring around each bill distinct. The birds were in a mixed flock of numerous other species that were diving and tipping among the piles and rocks along the beach.

To the best of my knowledge, the only previous record for the Ring-necked Duck from Southeastern Alaska in a flock of twenty-five birds observed by A. M. Bailey in Kootznahoo Inlet on October 27, 1920. (*Auk*. 44, 1927:187). —J. DAN WEBSTER, *Laboratory of Ornithology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.*

Bald Eagle Killed by Lightning While Incubating Its Eggs.—On December 26, 1940, Dr. A. A. Allen and the writer visited a nest of the Southern Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus l. leucocephalus*) which was $6\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of Wilson on Merritts Island, Brevard County, Florida. The nest was 45 feet up in a large, living, long-needled pine standing in a small, open grove of pines growing among the low palmettos which cover most of this section of the island. Close scrutiny of the nest with binoculars disclosed the tail of an eagle protruding above the rim of the nest. Going to the nest we attempted in numerous ways to flush the parent from the nest but were unsuccessful. Lightning had recently struck the tree and it seemed probable that this had killed the bird on its nest.

The writer climbed the tree on December 29 and found a dead adult eagle with wings slightly spread lying over the hollow of the nest. In the depression beneath the dead parent was an egg which had a punctured shell. A second egg was found

lodged in the outer rim of the nest, its shell being intact. The damaged egg beneath the bird, the position of the second egg, and the partially opened wings of the adult suggest that it was not killed instantly but struggled some before dying.

A careful examination of the carcass failed to show any evidence that the bird had been shot as it sat on its eggs. There were no wounds found nor was there any blood on the plumage. No direct evidence of the effect of the lightning was discovered on the body of the bird.



As nearly as could be determined the death of the eagle and the striking of the tree occurred at the same time. Both events had taken place about three or more weeks before. Internal decomposition of the bird was evidenced by the strong odor, yet the skin was intact except in the region of the anus. The eyes were dried up and considerably sunken. The broken egg beneath the bird was spoiled and part of the contents gone. Much of the bark of the tree had been torn from the limbs immediately above the nest and the trunk just below the nest had been fractured by the lightning. From these wounds considerable pitch had oozed and it was in the form of gummy drops instead of the liquid state characteristic of fresh pitch.—JOSEPH C. HOWELL, *Contribution No. 79, Zoological Laboratory, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Stillwater, Oklahoma.*

Goshawk Nesting in Michigan.—A nest of the Eastern Goshawk (*Astur atricapillus atricapillus*) was discovered June 17, 1940, by Porter one quarter mile from the northeast shore of North Fishtail Bay, Douglas Lake, Michigan, in the forested Bogardus Tract of the University of Michigan Biological Station, located about 9½ miles southwest of the city of Cheboygan. Attention was drawn to the nest by the shrill cries of the adult female.

The nest was located in a dead poplar tree in an area consisting of a thick growth of cedar, sugar maple, black spruce, balsam, birch, balsam poplar, and poplar. The area was generally rather low and damp, indicating perhaps a filled-in beach pool of Douglas Lake.

Built in a double-branched fork against the trunk of the tree, the nest was 30 feet, 4 inches above the ground. Measurements were as follows: Outside diameter, 2 feet, 6 inches; inside diameter, 1 foot, 4 inches; outside depth, 1 foot, 6 inches; inside depth, 3 inches. The nest was made of dead branches lined with green tips of cedar and balsam.

As soon as the nest was identified, cleats were nailed to a nearby tree and observations by the writers were started. While the cleats were being spiked to the tree, the female protested vigorously by swooping down upon us. She actually struck us with her wings on several occasions.

When we looked into the nest from the observation tree, we found two downy young crouching very quietly in the cup of the nest.

During the early morning hours we usually found the female absent, but when we neared the area about 10 A.M. or thereafter, her presence was always indicated by her shrill cries and aerial attacks. The male was never observed at the nestside, but at times was attracted to the vicinity of the nest by the female's alarm notes. He would then add his higher pitched calls to those of the female and join in the attacks.

One young bird disappeared from the nest on June 29 but the cause was unknown. The remaining young bird left the nest July 28 but remained in the area for sometime, being seen as late as August 28.—T. WAYNE PORTER, *Oak Harbor, Ohio*, and HARRY H. WILCOX, JR., *Department of Zoology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan*.

Other Records of Snow-killed Bob-white Coveys.—In a note in the last *Wilson Bulletin* (December, 1940:280) the writers asserted that "few snow-killed coveys have been recorded." Dr. A. W. Schorger has called our attention to the following instances recorded from Wisconsin:

"I remember a particularly severe Wisconsin winter, when the temperature was many degrees below zero and the snow was deep, preventing the quail, which feed on the ground, from getting anything like enough of food, as was shown by a flock I found on our farm frozen solid in a thicket of oak sprouts. They were in a circle about a foot wide, with their heads outward, packed close together for warmth." (John Muir, "The Story of my Boyhood and Youth", N.Y., 1913, p. 134).

"Since, there has been a cold winter when many quail froze in their roosting places; hundreds were thus frozen in bunches of ten to fifteen." (P. R. Hoy, *Proc. Wis. Nat. Hist. Soc.*, March, 1885:8) The word "since" appears to refer to the winter of 1849-50.—ROBERT McCABE and ALDO LEOPOLD, *University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin*.

An Unusual Condition in a Ring-necked Pheasant.—On December 19, 1940, a sick male pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus torquatus*) was brought to the Wildlife Laboratory at University Farm in St. Paul, by Karl Kobes of the Mud Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The bird was easily captured on the refuge the day before. It was extremely emaciated (640 grams) and was so weak that it could not right itself without assistance. Response to stimuli, whether food or other, was slow and since it seemed only a matter of a few hours before it would perish, the bird was killed to determine the cause of the sickness.

A post-mortem examination in both the Wildlife Veterinary Diagnosis Laboratories revealed no external evidence of injury and nothing of significance except that the proventricular mucosa was heavily impregnated with the retrorsely barbed awns of *Bidens cernua*, a composite that grows abundantly in moist low places in the northwestern part of the state. The achenes of this species are armed with four, long, barbed awns.

Microscopic sections showed that some of the awns had pierced the muscular layers through to the visceral peritoneum. It is possible that the irritation by the spines during the peristalsis induced by the intake of food would cause the bird such pain and discomfort that it would refrain from feeding and eventually starve to death even though there was plenty of food available.

Achenes of the various *Bidens* species are all armed with barbed awns, which if taken in sufficient quantity in the absence of other foods may be harmful to a gallinaceous bird such as the Ring-necked Pheasant. The condition described, however, is rare for in the writer's study of the food habits of over 650 Minnesota pheasants, only five birds were found to contain small quantities of these achenes and awns mixed with other foods.—LOUIS A. FRIED, *Game Biologist, University of Minnesota and State Division of Game and Fish, St. Paul, Minnesota.*

Burrowing Owls Eat Spadefoot Toads.—Spadefoot toads (*Scaphiopus*) occur in much of the range of the Western Burrowing Owl (*Speotyto cucularia hypugaea*) but their remains have not been found in the stomachs of Burrowing Owls examined in the research laboratories of the Fish and Wildlife Service of the U. S. Department of the Interior. Furthermore, the writer has found no reference in literature to spadefoots as an item in the owl's food. Disclosures in a recent examination of a large series of Burrowing Owl pellets are, therefore, of special interest. The material in question was part of a collection made in June, July, and August of 1937, 1939, and 1940 by Dr. William L. Jellison of the U. S. Public Health Service, Hamilton, Montana.

Detailed analyses of these pellets revealed the usual abundance of beetles, crickets, grasshoppers, and small mammals, along with an occasional bird, but also disclosed spadefoot toad remains in pellets from six counties in four states. Of the 35 pellets from 2 owl burrows in Beaverhead County, Montana, and the 345 pellets from 8 burrows in Okanogan, Whitman, and Yakima counties in Washington, all collected in June or early July, 9 per cent contained *Scaphiopus* remains. Spadefoot bones composed 30 per cent of one of the 8 pellets picked up in Prowers County, Colorado, on August 20 and were present in every one of the 9 pellets collected in Clark County, Kansas on the same day. A frequency of occurrence of 11 per cent (43 in 397 pellets) for an item not previously listed in the diet of Burrowing Owls is most unexpected, especially when recorded from material collected in widely scattered localities over a three-year period.—CHARLES C. SPERRY, *U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Denver, Colorado.*

Attack on Buffalo by the Magpie (*Pica pica hudsonia*).—Several notes have been published on the attacking of livestock by the Magpie (A. W. Schorger, *Auk*, 38, 1921: 276; T. C. Stephens, *Auk*, 38, 1921: 458; S. S. Berry, *Condor*, 24, 1922: 13; W. P. Taylor, *Auk*, 40, 1923: 126). The trait of attacking live animals is very old apparently and started with the buffalo. T. G. Anderson (*Coll. Wis. Hist. Soc.*, 9, 1882: 167) spent the winter of 1809–10 at Lac Qui Parle, western Minnesota. He shot an old buffalo against the advice of his companions who stated that it was scabby and worthless. He states further: "On examination, it was found that his back and the upper part of his sides were a mass of scabs and blood, where the magpies and other carnivorous birds had pecked and fed, as they do when these animals become too old and feeble to defend themselves."—A. W. SCHORGER, *168 North Prospect Ave., Madison, Wisconsin*

Starlings in Central Colorado.—The first record for the Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*, in Colorado was taken by Rockwell (*Wilson Bull.*, 51, 1939: 46) on December 17, 1938, at the Mile High Duck Club, about fifteen miles northeast of Denver. These first birds were seventy-five or one hundred in number. Since then scattered individuals and small flocks have been seen in and about Denver.

After a long and thorough search of the Pikes Peak region, seventy miles south of Denver and in east-central Colorado, I found eight Starlings at the Johnson Reservoir, ten miles south of Colorado Springs, on January 26, 1941. It is interesting to note that these birds sought the same sort of locality as did the Mile High birds, although they had to pass a major city to find it: an area of farm buildings near small sloughs and marshes and a large reservoir, and fields under cultivation or semicultivation. Significantly, there are no such areas of importance between the Denver area and the Johnson Reservoir.

As at the Mile High Duck Club, these Starlings were associated chiefly with Red-wings. In fact, this association may have led to an interesting call which one Starling gave. As I approached it, and while I had not yet gotten the flock into the air, this "look-out" uttered a number of Red-wing call notes. So realistic was the imitation that I might easily have passed him by entirely. It was more than a half-hour before I heard any typical Starling notes from the flock. In the meantime they were exceedingly hard to approach, but when left alone quickly returned to feeding with Meadowlarks and Red-wings.—SAM W. GADD, 1331 North Weber Street, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Clay-colored Sparrow in Ohio.—A specimen of the Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*) taken on South Bass Island, Ottawa County, Ohio, on May 12, 1940 is noteworthy in that it apparently represents an addition to the avifauna of the state. When first observed early in the morning the bird was feeding in company with a group of warblers in a small hackberry tree near the lighthouse at the southern tip of the island. Late in the afternoon the bird was collected by Mr. Kenneth H. Doan and myself in a chokecherry thicket within two or three rods of the tree where it was first seen. The specimen proved to be a male with moderately enlarged gonads (5.2 x 3.3, 5.4 x 3.8 mm.) and weighed 10.9 grams. The central pair of rectrices had been recently renewed and were not fully grown. The skin has been deposited in the collection of the Ohio State Museum at Columbus.—CHARLES F. WALKER, Stone Laboratory, Put-in-Bay, Ohio.

Nesting Bluebirds of Nashville—a Correction

We find an error in our article on "The 1939 Nesting Season of Bluebirds at Nashville, Tennessee" as it was published in a recent *Wilson Bulletin* (52, No. 3, September, 1940:183-90). In the last line of both Table 1 and Table 2 the word "hatched" should be replaced by the word "fledged".—Amelia R. Laskey.