

## A GRAND ISLAND, NEW YORK, HERONRY.

BY ALBERT R. SHADLE.

(*Plate XVI.*)

IN September 1929, while taking a walk with Dr. John Handy and son, we came upon a heronry in a woods about a half mile from the "East River" channel of the Niagara River, north of North Tonawanda, N. Y. It was too late in the day to make a careful study of the nesting site, so after a very casual examination during which I counted fourteen carcasses of Great Blue Herons, we returned home, intending to visit the place later for a more careful examination. Unfortunately I was unable to visit it again that year.

Although this piece of woodland covers about twenty or twenty-five acres, the part occupied by the heronry includes probably less than one acre. The trees are largely oak, elm, soft maple, and ash and many of them are large enough for lumber.

On August 22, 1930, another trip was made to the woods for observations, and I found that the heronry seemed larger than it was in 1929. A systematic check showed one hundred eighty-four nests present, of which seventy-seven were thought to be Great Blue Heron nests and one hundred and seven smaller nests probably mostly those of the Black-crowned Night Heron. There was such an intergradation in size in nests, that these last two figures represent only an approximate division rather than an actual one. The number of trees containing nests was about fifty, and the number of nests per tree varied from one to thirteen. One big cottonwood contained ten Great Blue Heron nests, Fig. 1, a large elm had eight of the large nests and five small ones, another had seven large nests and three smaller ones, and two red maple trees held respectively eight and seven small nests. The oaks and red maples generally contained the smaller nests, Fig. 2, while most of the larger nests were in the elms and cottonwood.

Judging from the condition of the foliage under these nests, all of them seemed to have been used this year. Under many of the groups of nests much of the weedy vegetation was killed, apparently by the excrement. However, the only one of the trees which

showed the killing effects of excrement was a large cottonwood. Since the killing of the trees is one of the results of the presence of numbers of such birds over a period of time it may indicate that this is a heronry of only a few years standing.

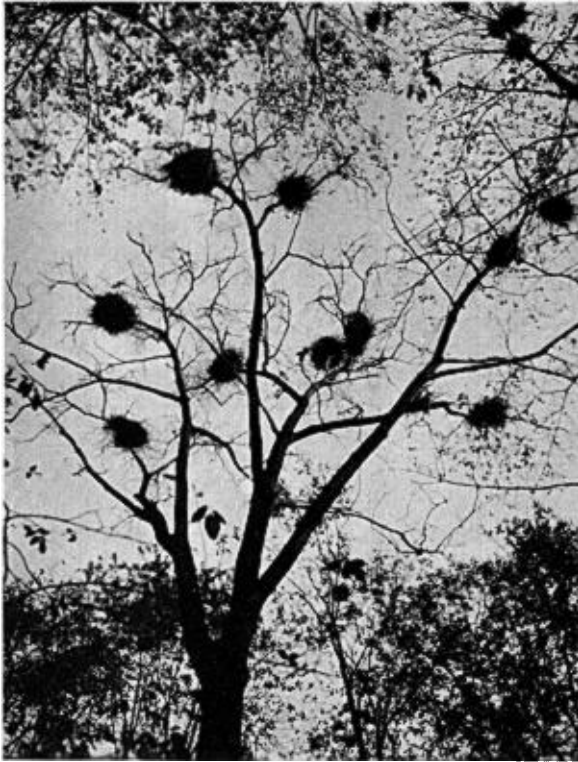
THE DISTRIBUTION OF NESTS.

No. nests in group	Small nests		Large nests	
	No. groups	No. nests	No. groups	No. nests
1	17	17	5	5
2	16	32	3	6
3	8	24	2	6
4	2	8	1	4
5	1	5	2	10
6	1	6	1	6
7	1	7	2	14
8	1	8	2	16
9	0	0	0	0
10	0	0	1	10
Total		107		77
Total number nests			184	

A very disastrous raid had been made in the heronry this summer apparently during the months of June and July, and the young when killed were in many cases nearly ready to leave the nest and the condition of the bodies when found suggested that they had been dead for a month or two. The killing had evidently been done with a .22 rifle for three discarded cartridge boxes were found on the site. A check of the dead birds was made and the heads collected with the following results:

Black-crowned Night Heron ( <i>Nycticorax nycticorax naevius</i> ).....	20
Great Blue Heron ( <i>Ardea herodias herodias</i> ).....	66
Total dead birds.....	86

Five Great Blue Herons were found still lying on the nests where they had been killed and one had lodged about twelve feet from the ground in a sapling, and was hanging by its neck. Fourteen birds, twelve Great Blue Herons and two young Black-crowned Night Herons were lying under one large elm which contained thirteen nests. Other numbers of dead were lying about in groups of from two to seven. Doubtless not all of the birds were found for it was



NESTS OF GREAT BLUE AND BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERONS,  
NORTH TONAWANDA, N. Y.

difficult to discover them when they got any distance away from the nests. The condition of the bodies showed that the killing had been done at different times.

As to a motive for the destruction and identity of the killer there is little or no evidence. The person was evidently not a good marksman for only two of the heads had been struck by a bullet. They were not killed for any part of the birds for nothing had been disturbed from the time the birds were shot and they were lying just as they had fallen out of the trees.

The way in which the birds were shot, the large number of cartridges used and the number killed, suggest that it was the work of a boy with a rifle or that of an extremely ignorant and malicious man. No man with the slightest suggestion of sportsmanship in him would have perpetrated such an act unless he thought he was thereby protecting the fish of the region.

The Herons of the state were formerly much more abundant than they are at present for they have been destroyed in considerable numbers. The Great Blue Heron is not protected by state law, and Herons in general are shot on sight because they take some of the fish. Man forgets that before he began his wasteful methods of taking fish, and his pernicious habit of poisoning the waters of the lakes and rivers with his wastes from cities and factories, that there were plenty of fish for both the Herons and man.

If the raiding continues it will soon result in the extermination of this heronry which is the largest one in this part of the state. The next largest one in this region is found in the Tonawanda swamps and it has about one hundred nests, as compared to one hundred eighty-four nests in the Grand Island Heronry. An effort will be made to protect it from future raids.

*University of Buffalo, Buffalo, New York.*