

## IMPORTANT HERON ROOKERIES IN SOUTHEASTERN IDAHO.

BY C. LYNN HAYWARD.

IN THE extreme southeastern corner of the state of Idaho lies a long, narrow valley. The southernmost end of this region is occupied by Bear Lake, a deep, blue body about twenty miles in length; and stretching to the northward on the level valley floor are many acres of swamplands, meadows and sloughs which form an ideal nesting ground for many species of shore and water birds.

Among the many interesting forms that have been under observation for the past number of years have been the nesting colonies of Treganza's Heron (*Ardea herodias treganzai*), Brewster's Egret (*Egretta thula brewsteri*) and the Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax hoactli*).

The rookeries of the Egrets and Night Herons occupy about ten acres in the most inaccessible portion of the swampland. In spring and summer water covers the nesting grounds to a depth of about three feet and there is a rank growth of tules and cattails over the whole region. Later in the season, however, after the nesting time is over, much of the water is drained off and some of the finer tules and wild grasses are cut for hay.

The nests of the two species occur in close proximity and are very similar in general construction. They are composed of dry tules piled rather loosely into a platform which rises from one to two feet above the surface of the water. Dry tules of the previous year which have fallen into the water as well as green ones growing about them serve to support the nests. The nests of the Egrets are on the average built somewhat higher above the water than are those of the other species and are generally slightly smaller in diameter. From three to five eggs are laid by both species but the most usual number is four.

Brewster's Egret arrives in Bear Lake Valley late in April or early in May when they may be seen in large flocks resting in the open fields near the nesting grounds. By the middle of May or earlier the nests are under construction and egg laying begins very

soon afterward. When the colonies were visited on June 4, 1928, the eggs were in various stages of incubation and a few of the young were hatched. Not more than four eggs were in any of the nests at this time, but the egg laying was apparently not over. When the colony was visited again on July 12 of the same season, all of the eggs were hatched although some of the young appeared to be only a few days old while others were nearly full grown. Although the nesting season in this region may seem somewhat late as compared with that of the Egrets of the Bear River Bay Region in Utah which Bent (1) records as being from April 22 to May 28, this is quite easily explained by the fact that the seasons are from two to three weeks later in the Bear Lake territory.

The Egrets remain in the valley until about the middle of September though I have never observed them in the region later than September 8.

The habits of the Night Herons are somewhat different from those of the Egrets in spite of the fact that the nests of the two species are very much alike. The nesting season of the Night Herons apparently begins earlier. When the nests were visited on June 4, 1928, most of the eggs had hatched, but it was not uncommon to find half grown young, newly hatched young and eggs in the same nest. As was stated before, only a few of the Egrets had hatched on this date. By July 12 all of the Night Herons had hatched and many of them were as large as the adults. These young would often alight in deep water and swim about after the fashion of Ducks.

The Night Herons probably arrive in the valley earlier than the Egrets and it is not uncommon to see stragglers in the region late in November, in spite of the usually severe weather at that season.

When these rookeries were visited in 1928, it was estimated that there were about two hundred nests of the Egrets and from three to four hundred nests of the Night Herons. Subsequent visits indicate that the colonies are in no way being reduced but are probably steadily increasing. The nature of the country in which the nests are situated makes them most difficult to reach and it is probable that they will remain unmolested for many years.

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<sup>1</sup> Bent, A. C. 1926. 'Life Histories of North American Marsh Birds,' U. S. National Mus., Bull. 135, p. 156.

The nesting grounds of Treganza's Blue Herons are located on the east side of the valley in the Cottonwood groves bordering Bear River. The rookery covers an area of about ten to fifteen acres and contains several hundred nests. It has been in existence since the valley was first settled in 1863 and doubtlessly was there many hundreds of years before that time. It is probable that this nesting site is molested very little.

The nests are built in true Heron fashion of large sticks piled loosely in the forks of the trees well above the ground. Egg laying begins early in May and by the last of the month many of the young have hatched. When the nesting season is in full swing, the squawks of the adults and young can be heard for a distance of several blocks away.

Treganza's Blue Herons arrive in Bear Lake Valley early in April and do not depart until the streams and ponds are well frozen over in late October or early November of normal years. They are common objects along the lake shore and the margins of streams throughout the summer months.

News of the actual increase of these large, slowly waning forms of bird life is of interest to ornithologists and nature lovers throughout the land and lends encouragement to those who may be striving to prevent their extinction.

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