

take prey it had sighted, then spread its wings, bringing them forward until they met, and with the tips of the quills in the water. The head was in the canopy formed by the wings and I could see the movements of the body as the bird apparently caught the fish bewildered by the darkness. Several times the bird raised its head from between its wings, ruffling its crest in so doing, to look about for possible danger, then ducked its head back into the shelter of its wings. Apparently it overtakes its prey and by making a canopy of its wings confuses them so that they are more easily caught. That its method was successful I found on collecting the bird and examining its stomach and gullet, which contained twelve fish from 15 to 30 mm. long."

Commandant Ph. Milon, now in Madagascar, where he spends his spare time bird watching and photographing, has just sent me the photographs here reproduced, which illustrate to perfection Rand's description of this remarkable habit of the Black Heron. These were taken on November 29, 1945, at Lake Anosy, Tananarive, in bright daylight. The birds appear to feed throughout the day.—J. DELACOUR, *American Museum of Natural History, New York 24, N. Y.*

White eggs of the Long-billed Marsh Wren.—In the course of ecological investigations in northern Ohio, in the summer of 1935, I visited a small marsh on the outer extremity of Bay Point, a large wave-formed sandspit which has appeared and disappeared and changed its position several times during the historical period of the Sandusky Bay area. Bay Point projects southward from the tip of the Marblehead Peninsula, appearing like a tooth on the upper jaw of Sandusky Bay, and is on its eastern flank, exposed to the full force of northeast storms which periodically, with great violence, sweep down Lake Erie. Bay Point has been established in its present position long enough for a number of large cottonwoods to have grown on it. At the time of my investigation there was on its outer extremity a small shallow pond, possibly two acres in extent, which changed from an open sheet of water almost without emergent vegetation in 1930 to a marsh of cattail and bulrushes with a few scattered buttonbushes in 1935.

On June 20, 1935, I examined the contents of several occupied nests of the Long-billed Marsh Wren (*Telmatodytes palustris*), some of which were sets of the normal brown-colored eggs and others were pure white or very faintly marked with a dark pattern. The following year this marsh wren colony was visited again, and again sets of white eggs were found. Unfortunately the numbers of sets were not recorded either year. Two of these sets were collected by Frank W. Braund, on May 13, 1936, one of which (containing six fresh eggs) is now in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. This apparent partial segregation of a latent hereditary character in a small newly formed colony is suggestive of the relationship of this species to the North American race of the Short-billed Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*), which habitually lays white eggs.

The egg collection of the U. S. National Museum contains 107 sets of the various races of *Telmatodytes palustris*, four of which have white shells. One, taken by E. J. Brown on the Potomac Flats, District of Columbia, on June 6, 1891, is a set of five pure white eggs. Another, containing two eggs, one white and one brown, was collected by C. W. Richmond, at Alexandria, Virginia, on July 9, 1897. A third is a set of six in which one white egg with an obscure dark pattern stands out among five normal chocolate ones. This was taken by Walter F. Webb, in Cayuga County, New York, on May 31, 1891. Still another set of four pure white eggs was collected by L. B. Bishop near Hamden, Connecticut, on June 24, 1893. Dr. Bishop describes this discovery in 'The Auk,' 11: 81, 1894. In fact, he records the taking of three sets of white eggs in the Quinipiack Marshes at Hamden, on June 24, July 11, and July



DELACOUR.—UNDER-WING FISHING OF THE BLACK HERON. (*Top*) BLACK HERONS AND FULVOUS TREE-DUCKS. (*Right*) BLACK HERON WADING. (*Left*) OPENING WINGS AT SIGHT OF FISH. (*Bottom*) UNDER-WING FISHING.

28, 1893. "The nests," said the author, "which are fairly typical of *C. palustris*, were not more than eight yards apart and probably belonged to the same bird." Dr. Bishop proceeded to theorize: "The white eggs of this species which have been recorded, taken in connection with the normally white eggs of its near ally, *C. stellaris*, and the frequently white eggs of the Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) have to my mind a peculiar importance as an additional argument for the truth of the theory of protective coloration, the covering of the nest rendering the usual dark pigment unnecessary." Referring to this statement, a footnote by J. A. Allen, then editor of *The Auk*, criticizes Bishop's conclusions as follows: "Albinistic eggs are well known to occur more or less frequently in birds that normally lay colored or spotted eggs, and which do not breed in holes or in covered nests, just as albinism may occur in the bird itself in any species. Why then should abnormally pale eggs be considered as having any significance in the two species above cited?"

It seems to the present writer that Dr. Bishop was closer to appreciating the significance of his find than editor Allen, although he seems to have "gotten the cart before the horse" in using it as proof of the theory of protective coloration. If this were the case it would be a matter of natural selection operating in reverse. Bishop fails to follow through and explain why, lacking the need for protective coloration; all marsh wren eggs are not white. On the other hand Allen apparently failed completely to realize the possible significance of the white variant eggs in evolution and that what he called "albinistic" eggs are the rule, not the exception, in many species of hole-nesting birds. Among the wrens, the Short-billed Marsh Wren is the only one in North America that habitually has a pure white egg (Reed, *North American Birds' Eggs*: 317, 1904). From the above cited records it is obvious that the potentiality is present in the case of the Long-billed Marsh Wren, and in view of the lack of survival value of brown eggs due to the covered nest, a pair of white-egg-producing Long-bills, if sufficiently isolated, could give rise to a white-egged race, just as the white-egged race of Short-billed Marsh Wrens may have evolved from brown-egg-laying ancestors. In this connection it is interesting to note that some South American races of *Cistothorus platensis* have eggs speckled with brown (Hartert and Venturi, *Novit. Zool.*, 16: 163, 1909), so we see a recurrence of that typically wren-like characteristic even in that species.

The above-mentioned small isolated colony of Long-billed Marsh Wrens at Bay Point, Ohio, in less than five years after becoming established, produced several pairs of white-egg-laying birds, which is suggestive of a possible line of descent of the wide-ranging *Cistothorus platensis*. It might even be considered as an additional reason for placing the Long-billed Marsh Wrens back in the genus *Cistothorus*, where they formerly reposed, as is recommended by Hellmayr in the 'Catalogue of Birds of the Americas' (Part 6: 114, 1929).—JOHN W. ALDRICH, *Fish and Wildlife Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C.*

Audubon and anting.—In the accumulating literature on the anting behavior of birds I have as yet seen no reference to what Audubon had to say on a cognate subject. On page 7 of the first volume of his 'Ornithological Biography' and again on page 48 of the 'Birds of America,' Vol. 5, he says of the young of the Wild Turkey after they leave the nest: "They roll themselves in deserted ants' nests, to clear their growing feathers of the loose scales, and prevent ticks and other vermin from attacking them, these insects being unable to bear the odour of the earth in which ants have been." This suggests a modified form of anting. Unfortunately Audubon does not give the evidence on which he bases his statement. He probably saw the operation, but his interpretation of its purpose may have been only surmise.—FRANCIS H. ALLEN, *West Roxbury, Mass.*