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RECENT OCCURRENCES OF THE AMERICAN EGRET IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION

By EMERSON A. STONER

A slow but steady increase has been noted by bird observers during the past nine years in the numbers of American Egrets (*Casmerodius albus egretta*) in the San Francisco Bay region. Grinnell and Wythe in their "Directory to the Bird-life of the San Francisco Bay Region" state under this species that the most recent record in the Bay region prior to 1925 was "a single individual observed in January, 1880, in San Rafael, Marin County" (J. Mailliard, *Condor*, 13, 1911, p. 50). The observation for 1925 referred to is one made by the writer (*Condor*, 28, 1926, p. 175) of twelve seen on the Suisun marshes between Benicia and Cordelia, on November 16. A prior record, of a single individual, has since been reported by T. I. Storer (*Condor*, 33, 1931, p. 34) who saw "one bird on marsh near Teal Station southwest of Suisun" on October 13 and 25, 1924. This latter record, then, is the first recorded observation of an American Egret in the San Francisco Bay region since 1880—a period of forty-four years.

Egrets apparently staged their comeback in the Suisun marshes before appearing in the more southerly portions of the Bay region. The first observation recorded in the *Condor* for the southern part of the Bay region, or the San Francisco Bay proper, is "during January and February (1928) near the works of the Portland Cement Company at Redwood City" (*Condor*, 30, 1928, p. 202). The American Egret was not added to the Life List of the Audubon Association of the Pacific until 1930, when an observation of three on September 14 was reported from Baumberg, Alameda County (Gull, October, 1930). Records published in the *Gull* in addition to the Baumberg record show occurrences at Lake Merritt, Oakland (Gull, November, 1930), near Redwood City (Gull, March, 1931), Bay Farm Island, Alameda County (Gull, May, 1931), and San Mateo and Dumbarton bridges (Gull, December, 1932, and January, 1933). Observations in this same general area are also recorded in *Bird-Lore's* "The Season" and under minutes of the Cooper Club

meetings, Northern Division, in the *Condor*. During the past two or three years there have no doubt been many observations for this section of the Bay which have not been recorded due to the increasing abundance of this species.

I can find no recorded observation for the northern shores of the San Francisco Bay proper, that is, north of the Golden Gate and Oakland. The observation "at the lagoon near Bird Rock, Marin County" (Gull, July, 1931), I am advised by Mrs. Laura A. Stephens, is a Drake's Bay observation. Mrs. Stephens, in a letter dated November 10, 1933, advises that she knows of no other Marin County record except for seven seen at Bolinas on May 7, 1929. Both of these observations are for the ocean side of Marin County rather than the Marin County Bay shore.

The entire Solano County shore, however, is populated either intermittently or continuously during the winter season, or, more properly, at all times other than the breeding period. In the western end of the county, along the San Pablo Bay, from the western border of the county to Vallejo, the Egret during the past four years is often found among the abundance of shore and water birds. Published observations for this vicinity include "Sears Point Road" (*Condor*, 33, 1931, p. 47), "near Vallejo, April 10, 1931" (*Bird-Lore*, 33, 1931, p. 206), and "near Vallejo, October 20, 1931" (*Bird-Lore*, 34, 1932, p. 22). I observed eleven Egrets while traveling over the Sears Point Road on October 28, 1933. This road crosses six miles of marsh west of Vallejo.

The greater portion of my records covers the territory in Solano County between Benicia and Cordelia. The paved highway skirting the Suisun Marsh for a stretch of fourteen miles between these towns has been covered by me personally by automobile many times a month. I have been assisted in my study of Egret occurrences in these marshes by Mr. James Barkley, a teacher in the Fairfield High School, who covers the above-mentioned road daily during the school season, or five times per week from September to June. Mr. Barkley has kindly reported to me any unusual occurrences noted by him. Observations finally became too numerous to list, it being very unusual during the past five years not to make an observation of Egrets during the period from late August to the middle of April. A survey of my records shows the earliest date of arrival in the fall to be August 11 (1933), and the latest date of departure in the spring to be April 24 (1930). As for numbers seen in this section, the following summary by years is made. These figures report the greatest number of birds seen at one trip along the road referred to.

1925-26, upwards of 12 birds	1929-30, upwards of 15 birds
1926-27, no observation	1930-31, upwards of 96 birds
1927-28, upwards of 8 birds	1931-32, upwards of 52 birds
1928-29, upwards of 40 birds	1932-33, upwards of 108 birds

My observations indicate that Egrets arriving in flocks in the fall, and not migrating farther, split up after a week or two, and spread over the marsh where they spend the winter, ordinarily as pairs or individuals. A large or favorite pond, however, may have a population of upwards of a dozen birds; especially is this true during the shooting season when many birds are frightened from their chosen ponds. Recordings such as "two in pond near country school", or "one near Goodyear Station", have been made continuously throughout a season, indicating that birds remaining here as winter residents have certain areas or ponds chosen by them for use as foraging grounds. If a bird is frightened from this chosen territory, the observer may expect to find that it has returned when he passes by again an hour or two later. Flocks passing through, but lingering a week or two in our marshes, remain in flocks during the period of their stay. I find, too, that birds wintering here assemble again in flocks before their departure in the spring.

Most of the Egrets which winter here depart about the middle of April. It has been a matter of conjecture to me where these comparatively late-leaving birds nest. The colonies of American Egrets known to nest in the San Joaquin Valley (Merced County) have constructed or remodeled their nests, and some are sitting on eggs, before most of the Solano County wintering birds migrate from these marshes. The California Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias hyperonca*) nesting in our Suisun Marshes have eggs hatching out before many of our wintering Egrets leave for their nesting grounds. It is quite possible, then, that some of the birds wintering here go north of our California borders to breed.

As for the habits of these beautiful birds, it will ordinarily be found that they are too shy or wary to allow of close inspection. A bird which is closer to the highway than a distance close to the width of a city block will often fly as soon as a car is stopped to make observations. I haven't yet approached an Egret sufficiently close to take a good picture. A flock of eighty-nine birds on the Suisun Marsh was approached within a distance of about seventy-five yards, which is as close an approach as I have made except in a moving vehicle. They are especially restless a few days before departure in the spring, apparently receiving the urge to migrate but being not especially anxious to leave their winter foraging grounds. I have endeavored to locate their roosting site, or sites, by staying in the marsh until after dusk. The birds which were watched, however, did not leave their feeding grounds until so late that it was impossible to trace their flight after they had gone a short distance away. The general direction leads me to believe, however, that they roost in one, or more, of a group of eucalyptus trees at considerable distance across sloughs and marsh over which it was impracticable for me to try to follow them. This species is respected on our marshes by hunters and I have heard of no instance of shooting of Egrets at any of the gun clubs, nor have I found a dead bird of this species on any of my trips through the marshes.

I have had little opportunity to make observations on the south side of the Suisun Bay. Mr. Barkley, on a hurried auto trip, without any special searching, noted two birds near Avon on December 25, 1933, thus showing that they are to be found in that area.

The bird is so conspicuous that a comparatively accurate census may be made of any section of the marsh. A steep hill, rising from the marsh to a height of five hundred feet, six miles north of Benicia, is a good observation point from which several square miles can be viewed. As the entire Suisun Marsh is apparently as equally attractive as the territory I have covered, I would estimate a present wintering population for the entire Suisun marshes at around two hundred birds. This is exclusive of transient flocks which would augment the number of birds on the marsh, depending upon size of flocks.

Benicia, California, December 31, 1933.

AN APPRECIATION OF DONALD RYDER DICKEY

WITH TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

By HARRY HARRIS

On several occasions since his untimely death on April 15, 1932, the salient facts of Donald Ryder Dickey's life have been recounted. Dr. Casey A. Wood gave a necessarily condensed résumé of these facts in the October issue of *The Auk* of that year. There was published in the *Bulletin of Yale University* No. 91 of October