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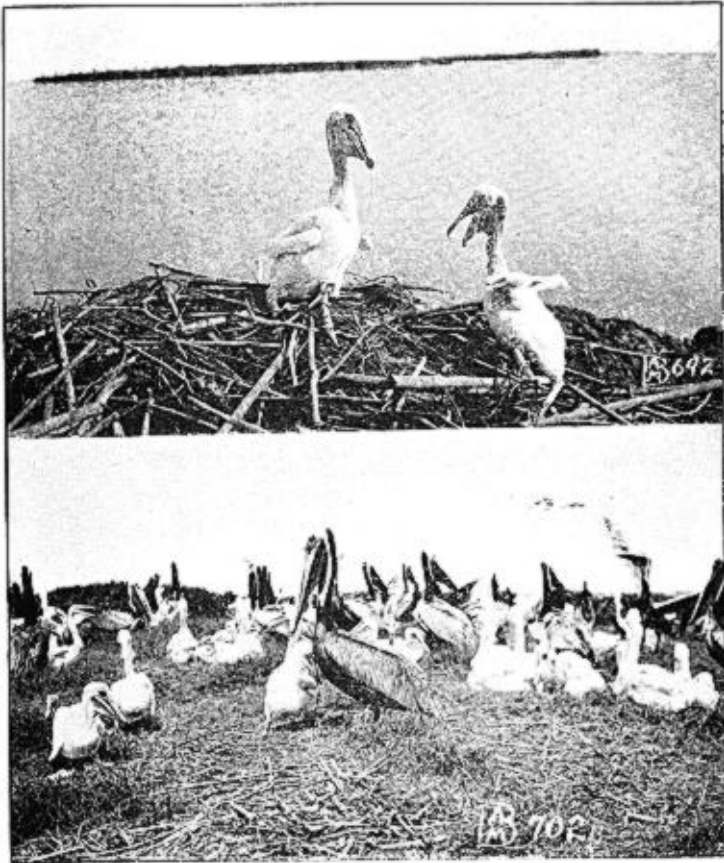
THE BROWN PELICAN,—A GOOD CITIZEN.

BY ALFRED M. BAILEY, LOUISIANA STATE MUSEUM.

Fishermen along the gulf coast, especially of Florida and Texas, have been complaining that the Brown Pelican is a destroyer of food fish, and these men have been flooding the offices of the Food Administration with letters asking that the pelican be exterminated.

The head of the Department of Conservation of Louisiana, Mr. M. L. Alexander, having received notice of these complaints, sent out an investigating committee to collect specimens along the gulf coast, and gather all the data possible concerning the different fish-eating birds. The Department, together with the State Museum, has long been compiling notes on the value of different birds aside from the æsthetic, and although we were convinced that the pelican was not guilty as charged, our data was not sufficient to give entire satisfaction.

The party, under the leadership of the State Ornithologist, Mr. Stanley Clisby Arthur, Mr. T. Gilbert Pearson of the Audubon Society, and the writer as the representative of the State Museum, left New Orleans the 6th of June on the Department yacht, "Alexandria." It was our intention to start off the Mississippi coast, and work westward, touching all places where pelicans were known to congregate in any numbers, and compile our data as circumstances warranted.



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The Chandeleur chain was first visited, and several days were spent on the different little islets and sandspits making up the group. Here sea birds were nesting by the thousands, a veritable snowfield of swirling birds continually circling overhead, and the ground was covered with eggs. A couple thousand pelicans were nesting on Errol and Grand Cochere, but there were no young as yet.

After a short run to Breton, Battledore and Hog islands, and a day studying the nesting skimmers, the "Alexandria" was headed for the "Mud-lumps" of the Mississippi river. These Mud-lumps themselves are interesting, for they are formed by a great pressure below thrusting up the earth's crust until small islands result. These lumps show the evidence of the great forces beneath, by the faulting so characteristic of rocky ledges. But if the shifting of great masses of earth is not sufficient to attract the naturalist, the enormous wealth of bird life congregated on such a small area would surely appeal to him. For there, where the Mississippi empties her muddy waters into the gulf, the largest colony of Brown Pelicans in North America have chosen their homes, and the fourteen little islets are literally covered with birds, at least fifty thousand, according to our estimate. The cries of the young birds were plainly audible from the "Alexandria," over five hundred yards off the islands, and the continual going and coming of the long strings of adult birds, almost always flying so close to the water that it seemed they must wet the tips of the primaries at every stroke, told plainly the great quantities of fish needed to feed such great numbers.

What better place than this, the largest breeding colony of Brown Pelicans in the country, to study the fearful ravages being made upon our dwindling food supply? Surely, if the food fishes are being destroyed as rapidly as the fishermen would have us believe, some evidence of it would be seen on these islands, where the young must be fed almost hourly. But try as we might, and we really wanted to find a few game fish that our data would not resemble a "stacked deck," we were not able to find a single fish that man would eat. The



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entire diet of the pelican seems to be of menhaden, a small bony sardine, that is used as fertilizer in the east. If the fish is of no more use to man than that, we surely could not begrudge this fine bird the few that he needs to satisfy his daily wants.

We took the youngsters and made them disgorge into our buckets, and we collected sundry specimens that were deposited on our shores as we trod among the fuzzy little fellows, but our data was always the same, just menhaden. And although we traveled clear to the Texas coast, stopping at all likely places, the answer was always the same. We preserved the stomachs of the birds in formaldehyde, and sent them on to Washington, while the skins were saved for the large Habitat Group being prepared for the State Museum.

The pelican is an easy-going, unsuspecting sort of fellow, and they paid no attention to my little blind, but came circling in and alighted before I had scarcely concealed myself. They are rough with the babies, and cuff and peck them unmercifully until the youngster finally succeeds in crawling under the crouching parent, and is so protected from the hot sun. I marvelled at the way the young feed, downy fellows almost as big as an old one, and actually weighing more, beg their food the minute the mother bird appears. They beg with a great fluttering of wings, and run their bills down the older bird's throat, until it seems they are trying to crawl inside. And all the time they carry on with little complaining notes, and hunch forward, in exactly the same way a calf does when he gets too eager for his dinner. They are quarrelsome too, and a couple of them started a tussling match, and rolled into Mr. Arthur's blind, and indeed, that was the difficulty in taking motion pictures, the birds came in too close. One fellow tried to let the tent rope down, and another, attracted probably by the reflection of the lens, stuck his head into the blind to see what it was all about.

The nests of the pelicans vary a great deal on the different islands. On Errol we found the nests built rather high, and a few of them in bushes as much as four feet off the ground, bulky,

substantial nests, while on the Mud-lumps, a few coarse sticks clumsily piled together sufficed. It is interesting to note the great range of time for nesting among the different colonies. On the Chandeleur chain we found fresh eggs only, while on the Mud-lumps, scarcely a hundred miles away, we found young six weeks old,—and not even an egg from there on to Texas, although the birds had started building on Timbalier. The first nesting birds on the Lumps chose the islands farthest out, and as these grew too densely populated, the islands nearer in were occupied until the innermost one had its pelican colony,—fresh eggs and very small young, while the birds on the outermost were already large enough to leave. The lighthouse keeper told us the outer islands would again be populated, that the birds nested continually from the middle of April until August, which raises the interesting question of whether the pelican raises more than one set of young a year. We took specimens in winter plumage, or rather the brown immature plumage which showed all signs of breeding, and other birds taken in the highest of plumage were evidently not breeding at all. We enjoyed our little survey, and although we desired more time among them, we came away happy with the knowledge that the pelican is safe, “not guilty” of being a food slacker.

NOTES ON THE FEBRUARY BIRDLIFE OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI AND LOUISIANA.

CHRESWELL J. HUNT, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.

I arrived in New Orleans about noon of January 28, 1918. That afternoon, just across the Mississippi River, in Algiers, I heard my first wild Mockingbird sing. It was a warm afternoon and Meadowlarks were also singing and a number of Grackles flew over. It surely did seem good after the snowdrifts that I had navigated in Chicago the previous morning. The following three days were spent about the city of New

* Read before the Chicago Ornithological Society April 9th, 1918.