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THE NEW BROWN PELICAN ROOKERY ON THE FLORIDA EAST COAST

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For more than a century, the Brown Pelican rookery on Pelican Island in the Indian River, near Sebastian, has been the Mecca of ornithologists and bird lovers. The island was made a federal reservation some years ago and placed under the protection of a warden. This breeding place was one of the sights of Florida and one of the best known rookeries in North America.

The Brown Pelican has incurred the hatred of the fishermen, who falsely charge him with eating food fish and thereby harming the fishing industry. During the World War, a determined effort was made to remove protection from this bird and subject him again to the persecution of hunters and others who find sport in killing defenseless creatures. The prompt and energetic action of the Florida Audubon Society was able to check this attempt, so that the Pelican yet enjoys what protection the law may give him.

The prejudice of the fishermen was not abated, however, and two or three years ago the island was raided at night and a large number of birds were killed. Whether or not this was the reason, the fact remains that last fall the east coast Brown Pelicans, as a body, deserted their ancestral breeding place and moved north to the south end of Mosquito Lagoon, about fifty miles south of Daytona. Here they selected a mangrove island which had been the site of a considerable colony of Ward's Herons (the Florida Great Blue), and as is their habit, began to breed in December.

The site of the new rookery is an island about half a mile in length, shaped like a crescent, not over five hundred feet wide

at its center. It is about two miles west of the Atlantic Ocean, among the other mangrove islands that dot the southern expanse of the lagoon. The outer shore is wooded with mangrove, the inner shore is sandy or marshy. In addition to the mangrove, the island bears not a little Spanish Bayonet (*Yucca*) and some palmetto scrub.

This part of the lagoon is a favorite ground for the fishermen of neighboring regions, and thus the new rookery was soon discovered. The Pelicans had left a federal reservation to found a new home in an out-of-the-way place where there was no warden nor any protection for them. The consequence was that when the young birds were about half grown and wholly unable to fly, certain unknown parties, probably ignorant fishermen, descended upon the colony with clubs and shot-guns and slaughtered them without let or hindrance.

About three weeks after this outrage, a party from the Halifax River Bird Club made a trip to the rookery for purposes of investigation. It was found that the rookery was on the western half of the island. The nearest approach is from the east. The waters are very shallow, so that it was necessary to make the last two or three hundred yards in a flat-bottomed skiff.

Passing through the mangrove and marsh-grass, down to the center of the island, we first saw signs of the slaughter. Here and there lay a dead and half-decayed Pelican. To the left, in the water, half-enclosed by the points of the crescent-shaped island, was a flock of two or three hundred adult birds, and a few more were descried resting on the shore at the west end.

The western half of the island was a charnel house. The bodies of young Pelicans, together with not a few of the adult birds, lay thickly scattered over all that part of the island where the birds had nested. An effort to count the bodies was made, and the consensus of opinion was that between 1,500 and 2,000 birds had been killed. The young birds remaining alive would not exceed 400 in number. Many eggs were scattered about on the ground, and dismembered nests were lying here and there. The entire scene was one of rapine and slaughter, depressing in the extreme. It passes comprehension that human beings would wreak such merciless destruction upon helpless and harmless birds.

The condition of the bodies was such that it was impossible to determine in what manner the birds had been killed, but

local fishermen told us that most of the work was done with clubs. I picked up several shot-gun shells, of the Winchester repeater variety, which would indicate that some, probably the adult birds, had been dispatched by gun-fire.

The young birds that had escaped were wandering about in disconsolate groups, and kept at a respectful distance. A few would permit of close approach, but snapped their huge bills viciously to express their disapproval of the intruders. If pressed too closely, they would make their way out into the shallow water, where they flopped and swam to a safe distance. Not a few young birds were found with broken wings and legs and otherwise injured.

The Pelican nests for the most part were in the mangrove bushes, but some were placed on the ground, and, most interesting of all, several were situated in clumps of Spanish bayonet. Some young birds were seen scrambling about among the sharp-pointed leaves of the yucca, and undoubtedly some have been wounded and perhaps killed in that strange and inhospitable environment.

An interesting discovery was that of a Ward's Heron's nest, superimposed upon an abandoned Pelican nest, placed in a yucca clump. There were two fledglings and one addled egg in this adopted home. This is the first instance that has come to my attention of a Ward's Heron choosing an old Pelican nest in which to rear its young.

The other birds seen on the island were Black and Turkey Vultures, feeding upon the bodies of dead Pelicans, several Red-winged Blackbirds, a small flock of Boat-tailed Grackles, and several Florida Yellow-throats and Myrtle Warblers. Florida Cormorants were common out in the lagoon, together with some Herring Gulls, Royal Terns, a few Horned and Pied-billed Grebes, and thousands of Lesser Scaup Ducks.

The raiding of this new rookery has been reported to the federal warden and the Biological Survey, and to the National Association of Audubon Societies. It is hoped that the United States government will take over the island, or, better still, the southern portion of the lagoon, as a bird reservation. It is too late to save the young Pelicans of 1924, but if the old birds return to their home next fall, a federal warden on the spot, armed with Springfield rifles and considerable courage, could prevent the recurrence of what has taken place this year.

The charge that Brown Pelicans eat food fish is utterly without foundation. Dr. E. W. Nelson, Chief of the Biological Survey, states that after carefully inspecting the breeding grounds of both east and west Florida and examining hundreds of fish dropped by the Pelicans, he found that almost without exception the fish caught to be menhaden and grass minnows, species that are useless for human food, and that not one fish so examined was of any commercial value. Dr. Frank M. Chapman points out that the case is not proved against the Pelican, because fish were more numerous on the east coast when Pelicans were more abundant than they are today. Pelicans feed chiefly on inedible fish or fish that are too small to be marketed.

MIGRATION NOTES FROM STATE COLLEGE CENTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

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The following notes were taken during three and a half years spent at the Pennsylvania State College, and cover the spring and fall migrations from September, 1914, through June, 1917, and the spring migration of 1919. No attempt will be made to describe in any detail the topography or geographical situation of this locality for this has already been ably done by Mr. Richard C. Harlow in papers that he has published concerning the breeding birds of Center County. Avoiding any useless repetition it is necessary to state merely that as its name indicates Center County lies in the geographic center of the State, and is a rough mountainous county lying well within the range of the Alleghenies that divide the State at this point. This range of mountains runs approximately north and south and has unquestionably a distinct bearing on the movement of the birds to and from their summer homes. That many of them follow these ridges in their long journeys is borne out by the early dates at which certain species appear in the spring, and by the late appearance of many of them in the fall, dates both earlier and later than recorded for these same species both farther north and farther south. River valleys undoubtedly influence migrations but my limited experience would indicate that mountain ranges are of far more importance in guiding birds at this time. Little I believe has been published concerning migration data for this part of the State.