

GENERAL NOTES

An apparent agonistic display of the Whistling Heron (*Syrigma sibilatrix*).—
In view of the recent interest in relationships and behavior of herons (e.g., Bock, Amer. Mus. Novitates No. 1779, 1956; Meyerriecks, Nuttall Ornithol. Club. Publ. No. 2, 1960), I offer the following description of an apparent agonistic display of the Whistling Heron (*Syrigma sibilatrix*) observed at six kilometers southwest of Colonia Garabí, Corrientes, Argentina.

Whistling Herons are the herons most frequently noted in the pampas of Corrientes. They are most often seen along roads wherever there are small or larger pools of water. From the vicinity of a small pond between upland pampas and a small patch of woodland on 27 September 1967, I heard loud, squawking calls. I crept to the edge of the woods, from whence I saw across the pond (about 40 meters away from me) two Whistling Herons confronting each other, calling and obviously displaying. Because the display itself held my attention, it was several minutes before I detected another Whistling Heron in the grass only 10 meters from the displaying birds. This lone bird remained silent and inactive throughout the encounter, which it was facing; it seemed to be watching the encounter as intently as was I. The displaying herons were facing each other in close proximity, often only one-third of a meter apart. At times they stood motionless with heads held high and dark head plumes slightly erected. Suddenly one of the two (bird 1) would move its head forward, calling *ka-wee-ok*, until its head was fully extended and its head, neck and body were virtually parallel to the ground. Simultaneously the second bird (bird 2) would draw back its head, emit a call sounding like *se-wee*, and then, as the initiating bird's head and conspicuously reddish, dark-tipped bill were fully extended toward it, commence a forward motion of its head over that of its apparent antagonist. Bird 1 reacted to this by lowering its head, bill, and neck below the horizontal, and, synchronously with the advancing head of bird 2, by posteriorly withdrawing its head from under that of bird 2. When its head was sufficiently withdrawn, bird 1 would then rapidly raise its head, still withdrawing it posteriorly, and emit a *se-wee* call about coinciding with the most advanced position of bird 2's head, and the latter's *ka-wee-ok* call. The birds would then again reverse their actions in the manner just described. About seven to 12 such interactions took place over nearly a minute in a single bout. I observed six such bouts in eight to 10 minutes. Between bouts the interacting individuals were motionless and silent. Movements of the two birds forward and backward during a bout included some short steps and a gradual circling of the birds, during which each bird occasionally lost its balance and used one or both wings to right itself. I feel such movements were caused by the unevenness of the terrain, and that these movements were not a part of the displays. It did appear, however, that both birds had their wings slightly extended for the duration of each bout. One of the birds may have seen me, or not; at any rate, after the sixth bout all three birds flew abruptly off across the pampas.

I assume this to have been an agonistic encounter because of the nature of these displays (for example, the prominence of bill movements forward, and withdrawal of the bill, the relative lack of prominence of the head plumes, and the quite sleeked plumages of both birds). The third bird could have been a female (awaiting the outcome of the conflict?). It certainly appeared to be watching the encounter, and it flew away with the other two birds. Except for the observation that the Whistling Heron does not remind me very much of a night heron (*Nycticorax*), I am otherwise quite unprepared to discuss the significance of these displays in the behavior of this species,

or with respect to its possible relationships (for recent comments on its systematics see P. S. Humphrey and K. C. Parkes, Proc. 13th Internat. Ornithol. Congr. 1963:89-90).

These observations were made while I was conducting field studies of woodpeckers under a grant (N.S.F.—GB-5891) from the National Science Foundation.—LESTER L. SHORT, JR., *The American Museum of Natural History, New York, 1 April 1968.*

Use of man-made islands as nesting sites of the Common Loon.—Many species of waterfowl commonly nest on islands where nesting success is generally higher than at other sites. This has led waterfowl managers to provide islands as a habitat improvement measure (Hammond and Mann, J. Wildl. Mgmt. 20:345-352, 1956). A technique was developed on the Chippewa National Forest in north-central Minnesota to provide floating sedge-mat islands for nesting sites, especially for Ring-necked Ducks (*Aythya collaris*). An unexpected result was the immediate and frequent use of the islands as nest sites by Common Loons (*Gavia immer*). Of eight water areas containing groups of islands, six had an island occupied by loons. This would indicate that loon pairs find man-made islands highly desirable for nesting. The technique may provide a means of increasing nesting success of loons throughout much of their range, should this ever become a matter of concern.



FIG. 1. Typical island occupied by nesting loons.

The islands occupied by loons ranged in size from 36 ft² to 100 ft². Sedges (*Carex* spp.), leatherleaf (*Chaemeadaphne calyculata*), bog birch (*Betula pumila*) and sphagnum (*Sphagnum* spp.) are typical of the plant community composing the islands. They are free-floating pieces of bog, cut away from the edge and anchored in open water (Fig. 1).—JOHN E. MATHISEN, *Chippewa National Forest, Cass Lake, Minnesota, 4 September 1968.*

Egg transportation by a female Mallard.—In late May of 1960 in the Bethany Bog, in Bethany, Connecticut I observed a female Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) fly from its nest with its egg in its bill. At this time the water had receded below the sphagnum level leaving the area surrounding the nest dry.