

The Unusual Flight of White Herons in 1902

BY WILLIAM B. EVANS

DURING the late summer months and early fall of the present year (1902), in southeastern Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey and parts of Delaware and Maryland, an unusual number of White Herons have been seen, at points near the coast and inland along the tide and fresh water courses. At least two species were represented in this northerly movement which seems to follow the nesting season, the American Egret (*Ardea egretta*), and the Little Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*). The latter, although dark blue in the adult plumage, is an almost pure white during its first summer. This bird was unusually numerous, and to it, probably, most of the white heron records refer. A third species, the Snowy Heron (*Ardea candidissima*), has also been reported, but as just stated, in most cases these records probably refer to the Little Blue Heron, the two birds being of nearly the same dimensions.

As the appearance of any of these birds in the Delaware Valley region is now considered worthy of notice in ornithological annals, it has been thought worth while to endeavor to collect as much information as possible concerning them, and for the following records I am indebted to many observers both within and without the pale of D. V. O. C. membership.

A brief summary of the distinguishing characters of size and post-nuptial plumage of these herons, condensed from Chapman's "Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America," may here be given a place, since the three are undoubtedly often confused.

The American Egret (*Ardea egretta*) which now breeds as far north as Virginia, measures forty-one inches from the tip of beak to the end of tail. The entire plumage is white; legs and feet black; bill yellow.

The Little Blue Heron (*Ardea cœrulea*) breeding to about the same limit, is twenty-two inches in length. The adult plumage is of a dark bluish slate color, except the head and neck which are maroon chestnut. The legs, feet, and bill are black. But the immature bird is white, the plumage sometimes more or less washed with slaty; the tips of the primaries always bluish slate color; legs and feet greenish yellow.

The Snowy Heron (*Ardea candidissima*), which breeds as far north as Long Island, N. Y. (*vide* Chapman), measures twenty-four inches in length. The entire plumage is pure white. Legs black, feet yellow, bill black, yellow at the base.

The abundance and distribution of these birds, particularly *Ardea candidissima*, has been so greatly altered by the demands of the plume-wearing fashions, that the information contained in the older books can no longer be relied upon as expressing present conditions. From the fact that not a single specimen of *Ardea candidissima* was found among the fifty birds shot, which I have seen or known of, we may suppose that the Snowy Heron is now a rare bird with us.

Again the Little Blue Heron, which is set down in Stone's "Birds of Eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey," as a rare straggler from the south, with but three positively identified specimens to its credit, seems within the last four years to have been more numerous as a late summer and fall visitor.

The following records of *Ardea egretta* are prior to 1902, and not contained in the last mentioned work nor in the Club's Proceedings.

In 1894 in late summer, one shot at Buzby's Bogs, three miles southwest of Taunton, N. J., now in possession of Joseph S. Evans, Marlton, N. J.

About 1896, one shot from flock of six at Buzby's Bogs, now in possession of Samuel Burroughs, Haddonfield, N. J.

1902 Records.

7 mo., 10th, 1902, one shot from flock of seven near Kennett Square, Pa.—C. J. Pennock.

7 mo., 20th, 1902, one seen by Witmer Stone at Wawa, Pa.

7 mo., 26th, 1902, one shot near Berwyn, Pa., along Darby

Creek. Reported by F. L. Burns, in the Wilson Bulletin, No. 40, page 109.

8 mo., 3d, 1902, four near Cobb's Landing, Eastern Shore of Va. S mo., Sth, 1902, eight flying in line closely followed (in fact one of the string) by a Great Blue Heron.—F. C. Kirkwood.

Captures or reliable records of *Ardea candidissima*, none

Records of *Ardea coccyzus*, prior to 1902.

8 mo., 1898, one (white plumage) shot in New Jersey, now at Louis Weber's, No 2518 N 2d St., Phila., Pa.

7 mo., 23d, 1899, one (white plumage) seen on the Delaware river below Frenchtown, N. J., by John D. Carter and Wm. B. Evans

During Sth and 9th months, 1899, forty or fifty seen in a swamp near Bristol, Pa., by G. F. Brown.

Latter part of Sth mo., 1900, abundant at Stone Harbor, N. J.—D. N. McCadden

About 1900, two in white plumage shot at Bristol, Pa., now in possession of J. R. Beath, 2241 Frankford Ave., Philadelphia

About 1900, two (white) shot at Trenton, N. J., now in possession of Edwin C. Axe, 4137 Frankford Ave.

1901, fifty or sixty seen on Atlantic City meadows, N. J., by responsible people known to W. H. Werner, Atlantic City, N. J.

The following are records for 1902.

Cape May, N. J. First seen during first week in 7th mo. During second week in Sth mo. greatest abundance. One flock of forty or fifty. Probably two hundred seen during day, unless same flock was seen more than once. Last bird seen 9th mo. 29th. The species has been recorded at Cape May in summer for ten years.—H. Walker Hand

Tuckerton, N. J. First seen 7th mo., 10th. Disappeared about the last week in Sth mo. Just previous to their departure they were very numerous. Forty or fifty seen at one time feeding in a salt pond, three or four acres in extent. On 7th mo., 14th, one (young) shot. On the 18th, six young shot and two adults. Number secured in all, twenty.—A. H. Jillson.

Gunpowder Marsh, Md.

7th mo.,	13th,	number seen,	six
	15th,	" "	eleven.
	16th,	" "	seven.
	25th,	" "	fifty
	28th,	" "	thirty.
	29th,	" "	thirty
	30th,	" "	fifty.
8th mo.,	2d,	" "	thirty
	5th,	" "	sixty
	7th,	" "	thirteen.
	9th,	" "	eleven
	13th,	" "	five.
	18th,	" "	three.
	20th,	" "	eleven.
	21st,	" "	three.
	25th,	" "	seven
	30th,	" "	three.
9th mo.,	1st,	" "	one.

Possibly some of the birds here recorded may be *Ardea egretta* In 1896, recorded as early as 7th mo, 8th, and as late as 10th mo., 7th, in 1892.—F. C. Kirkwood.

Kennett Square, Pa. Flock of white herons, seen during last two weeks of 7th mo. on Red Clay Creek. One specimen, shot, was examined by C. J. Pennock.

Billingsport, N. J. First seen about 7th mo, 20th. About 8th mo, 12th, seen in large numbers. On 8th mo., 16th, one (white) shot. On 8th mo, 25th, one (white) shot (seen at Krider's gun store). Departed about 9th mo., 1st. One week before 9th mo., 1st, about 400 birds seen on the river bar.—Albert M. Barnes.

Point Pleasant, N. J. On 7th mo., 22d. Twelve birds in white plumage seen.—Stewardson Brown

At Ephraim Pond, near Haddonfield, N. J. First seen about 7th mo, 24th. On 7th mo., 27th, twelve or fifteen seen, one in adult plumage. One (white) shot and brought to Academy of Natural Sciences.—Samuel N. Rhoads.

Rancocas, N. J. One (white) seen flying, three-quarters of a

mule above Centreton, N. J., on 7th mo., 26th. On 9th mo., 14th, one in white plumage flew out of gravel hole in which was considerable water—Emily Haines.

Frederick, Md. On 7th mo., 30th, two birds in white plumage seen and shot Sent to Philadelphia to be mounted.—M. Hoke.

Lenape, Pa. One (white) seen on 8th mo., 3d, along Brandywine creek. Two were afterward shot and mounted in West Chester.—John D. Carter.

Cat Creek, Va. On 8th mo., 5th, ten in white plumage seen by F. C. Kirkwood.

Riverton, N. J. White birds seen on Delaware river meadows just after exceedingly heavy rains of 8th mo., 10th.—Howard G. Taylor.

Moorestown, N. J., Lippincotts' pond. About 8th mo., 12th, first seen. On 8th mo., 17th, five seen by Morris Linton. On 8th mo., 19th, five seen by Wm. B. Evans. On 8th mo., 20th, six seen by A. A. Mickle. On 8th mo., 21st, one seen by Chas. Evans. Reported also by Walton B. Leeds.

Westtown, Pa. On 8th mo., 13th, one (white) seen with broken leg. On 8th mo., 14th, three (white) seen, and two (white) on 8th mo., 15th (James G. Vail).—George Forsythe

Gunpowder Marsh, Md. On 8th mo., 16th, one adult seen from passing train by Jas. A. G. Rehn

Bristol, Pa. On 8th mo., 17th, two (white) seen four miles north of Bristol. On 8th mo., 24th, two* (white) seen on Florence Bar, and on same day one* (white) seen on Crosswick's Creek. On 9th mo., 21st, fourteen (white) seen below Bristol near mouth of Neshamny Creek.—Thomas D. Keim.

Buzby's Bogs, near Taunton, N. J. On 8th mo., 23d, one (white) shot, mounted at Krider's. On 9th mo., 10th, twelve or fifteen seen, and two shot. Seen to catch and eat small frogs.—A. C. Powell.

The same flock also reported by Joseph S. Evans, of Marlton, N. J.

Cupola, Pa. On 8th mo., 28th, one (white) shot on dam in Brandywine Creek. Specimen given to Chreswell J. Hunt.

* Claimed by Dr. C. C. Abbott, who was present, to be *A. candidissima*

Moorestown, N. J., Haines' Pond On 8th mo, 29th, six seen, one in adult plumage. On 8th mo., 30th, one (white) seen. Also found body of one (white), shot about 8th mo, 16th, by boys. On 9th mo., 3d, one (white) seen.—Wm. B. Evans.

Sharon Hill, Pa For week, 8th mo, 30th, to 9th mo, 6th, a flock of twenty-five to thirty white herons, one dark blue, seen near mouth of Darby Creek.—J. H. Lincoln

Townsend, Del Large number seen on last day of 8th mo —H. W. Wenzel.

Tinicum and Mond's Islands, in Delaware below Phila. For two weeks from 9th mo, 1st, small white herons and one small blue seen Fourteen in one flock —Edward Singleton

New Jersey shore, opposite Chester, Pa. On 9th mo., 5th, six (white) seen in shallow water. Seen from a passing boat.—F. N. Owen.

New Egypt, N. J. During first two weeks of 9th mo, one adult shot by J. R. Beath, Jr, and forwarded to Phila by Adams Express. Never arrived —J. R. Beath.

Mouth of Cohansey Creek, N. J. On 9th mo, 10th and 11th, seventy-five (white) seen from boat.—James Roney.

Small White Herons were also seen in the following localities but the exact dates were not preserved.

West Grove, Pa Along White Clay Creek.—Wm. B Harvey.

Moylan, Pa., along Ridley Creek —Nathan Kite.

Atlantic City, N. J. (2 specimens to be mounted).—W H Werner.

Bristol, Pa. (flock of 25-30), during 8th mo.—G. F. Brown.

Cape May, N. J 1 specimen mounted at Kriders —Vanne-man.

To the above may be added the notes contained in two letters, received in answer to requests for information.

*** "The White Herons were first seen about Billingsport (N. J.) about July 20th, but only in small numbers, but about the 12th of August a large flight came on, and these birds were here in large flocks until about September 1st

*** "From my own observations and from those of friends, I estimate that on the 'Bar' at low water, fully four hundred

(400) of these birds would congregate each day for about a week, when the number began to diminish—but I am glad to say not from the hunter's gun, for they left in small flocks, never more than thirty, which did not make their exit so marked.

“On Sunday I found an old man who had found a wounded heron early in the season, and now he has made quite a pet of it, and while the bird is now able to fly from careful nursing, it makes no effort to escape and seems entirely content with its new surroundings. The old man says he would not part with the heron for \$25.00, for it hops about his shanty and makes him company. He also told me that the Heron will fly off for two hours sometimes, but returns with a morsel of food it cannot procure around the cabin

“Yours very truly,

(Signed)

“ALBERT M. BARNES”

“ATLANTIC CITY, N. J., OCTOBER 23, 1902.

* * * “During the time the *A. coerulea* are here I am very busy with other work. To my knowledge the above-named species has been noticed here on the meadows for the last three or four years. They make their appearance about the last week in July or beginning of August, and generally stay about two or three weeks. Last year (1901) they were more numerous than at any other time

I never found them breeding here in Jersey. In 1872 I found quite a large colony of *A. candidissima* breeding in the neighborhood where Ocean City is now located. I counted as high as eight or ten nests on one tree. I secured some magnificent specimens of birds and also nests and eggs, which are now in the collection of Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa. There were also a few sets of *A. virens*, but no sign of the Little Blue Heron (*A. coerulea*) * * *

Respectfully,

(Signed) W. H. WERNER