

1975 CENSUS OF WADERS AT CLARK'S ISLAND

by Brian A. Harrington, Manomet Bird Observatory

In 1974 Wayne Petersen, Kathleen S. Anderson, and I visited Clark's Island in Plymouth to look for ibises that Wayne suspected must have been breeding on the island. Because the visit was late in the season (mid-July) and because we had limited time, we were unable to survey the whole island to count the number of herons and egrets that were nesting. Nevertheless, we did find enough evidence to prove nesting for three species, including the first state record for Glossy Ibis.

Thanks to the kindness of property owners and residents of Clark's Island, we were able to return repeatedly during the 1975 nesting season and thus compile an accurate count of heron nests. We surveyed the whole eastern third of Clark's Island and marked all active nests found. Easier said than done, however, for most of the vegetation on the eastern half is poison ivy! But still, with appropriate words to the ivy gods, thick layers of clothing, and mirrors atop long poles, we thrashed through the census area muttering occasional words that did not seem to offend the herons. The final tally of active nests, far exceeding our expectations, was:

Black-crowned Night Heron	350
Snowy Egret	150
Glossy Ibis	40
Little Blue Heron	5
Great Egret	5

In general, the Black-crowns chose nest sites in tall old field cedars, usually more than ten feet above the ground. Their nesting success was excellent, the average pair rearing two to three young to at least ten days of age, after which point many young became difficult to find.

Snowy Egrets tended to nest in deciduous bushes, although some nested in old field cedars (usually in the lower half). The most commonly used bushes were arrowwood and high bush blueberry. Most pairs raised two young to ten or more days old.

Glossy Ibises nested only in deciduous bushes, usually between ten and fifteen feet high. Arrowwood was used more than any other species. The majority of pairs reared at least one chick to at least ten days of age, after which time the young were difficult to find.

Great Egrets nested at the top of high bush blueberries, also about ten to fifteen feet above the ground. Each pair raised at least one chick, and some apparently raised two.

Our report on Little Blue Herons is less reliable because the eggs and nests are virtually indistinguishable from those of Snowy Egrets. Moreover, the small young are very difficult to identify except in the hand. Because we did not handle many young, we were often unable to identify positively Little Blue Heron nests. Thus we have estimated their number from counts of adults that we saw regularly.

To summarize, the heronry at Clark's Island was both much bigger and more successful than we had anticipated it would be. This information seems very encouraging in the light of recent concerns about the influence of DDT on Black-crowned Night Heron nesting and its consequences on the size of northern heron populations. We hope to be able to continue our studies in 1976 to determine nesting success and population changes at Clark's Island, Massachusetts' largest heronry.

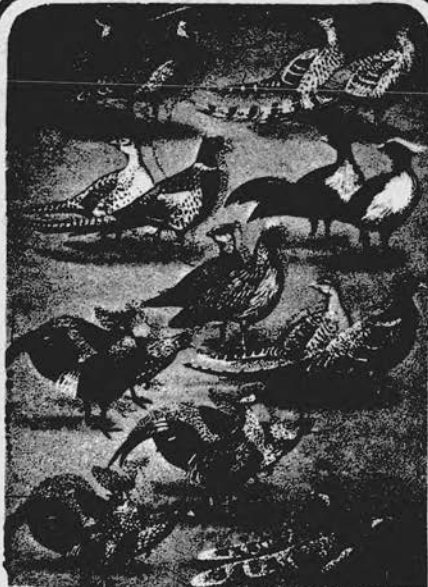


Plate by John Henry Dick from
"A Field Guide to the Birds of India."
(Actual plate is in full color.)

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