

NOTES

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EASTERN GLASS LIZARD AS PROBABLE PREY OF GREAT EGRETS

JAMES A. RODGERS, JR.^{1,4}, STEPHEN T. SCHWIKERT¹, TIMOTHY F. BREEN²,
AND ELIZABETH K. MCCONNELL³

¹Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 4005 S. Main Street
Gainesville, Florida 32601

²Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 1239 S.W. 10th Street
Ocala, Florida 34474

³Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 620 S. Meridian Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

The Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) is an opportunistic forager, taking mainly fish but also consuming invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, and occasionally birds and mammals (see review by McCrimmon et al. 2001). It uses feeding sites that range from marine-estuarine to freshwater dominated habitats. Egrets are primarily diurnal feeders and use mainly slow, stalking foraging techniques (Rodgers 1983). In this note we report a previously unreported prey species.

On 13 September 2001 we were capturing nestling Great Egrets at a small mixed-species waterbird colony in Port Richey, Pasco County, Florida for radio instrumentation. Also nesting at the site were Little Blue Herons (*Egretta caerulea*), Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), and Anhingas (*Anhinga anhinga*). All nests were located in baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*) flooded to a depth of about 1-2 m. The colony was in a water-retention site behind a strip mall adjacent to US 19.

When attempting to capture one of two 4-week-old Great Egret nestlings, we noticed two eastern glass lizards (*Ophisaurus ventralis*) draped over branches about 20-40 cm below the edge of the egret nest, which was about 3.5 m above the water. During the capture procedure, one of the glass lizards fell into the water. However, we collected the other glass lizard for examination. This glass lizard was 47.8 cm in total length and 14.8 cm in snout-vent length. The specimen had 26 puncture marks from near the head to just past the vent, indicative of pecking by the parent or nestling egrets. We estimated the lizard had been dead two to three days.

Eastern glass lizards are a common species near wetlands and moist soils (P. Moler, pers. comm.). Parent Great Egrets are not known to carry food in the bill prior to regurgitating prey items to their young. Whereas, glass lizards may be a more common prey of egrets than this one report suggests, these two glass lizards beneath the nest suggest that the nestlings either had difficulty ingesting the lizards or did not find the prey suitable to eat.

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⁴To whom correspondence should be sent.