

zone them seem to prefer the higher mature trees. This zone gave way to all mature trees which also included great blue heron nests. The majority of the great egret nests were in this area. Uprooted trees in this area made passage more difficult and the vegetation under the trees was thicker than the smaller hackberry. Apparently, a severe northeast storm on May 25, 1979 uprooted about 5% the trees in this area^{2E}. Here in the major great egret - great blue heron colony I saw my first adult cattle egrets. There were approximately two or three adults in breeding plumage sitting singly on the uprooted trees. I tried to follow them thinking that their nesting colony was in this area (it wasn't) but they were wary to my approach and flew to other parts of the forest. Later, on my return through the night heron colony I found a small colony of cattle egret nests. You can't see up through the canopy in the night heron area, but there was a small open area immediately before the cattle egret area which allowed me to see several adult cattle egrets roosting above the canopy very near to where I found my first white young in the low nests usually occupied by the brown young of the night heron. I was excited but my time was running out. I hadn't seen Jack in four hours and he was my transportation. I took the remaining two pictures on my roll and made a straight line from this area directly to shoreline to mark the location. Once inside the canopy, it is difficult to keep any bearing of direction due to the sameness of the vegetation.

The flies again greeted me and I made a beeline (flyline?) to the top of the lighthouse where I ate lunch. I was wondering where Jack was when his boat pulled up. The flies had driven him to walleye fishing off shore. He pointed to an area where he had seen an adult snowy egret enter the canopy. It seemed to be the same area where I had seen the nest with the white young. I made plans to return.

On July 2, I returned alone prepared to census accurately as possible the black-crowned night heron colony. I had hoped others could come with me to help with the job but no one was available. The flies for some mysterious reason had subsided. I arrived at 8:00 a.m. on the island and entered the black-crowned night heron colony.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON

Inside the canopy all but a few of the young birds were out of the nest and "clambering among the branches"⁵. It was near the end of the breeding season as young night herons first fly at about six weeks^{6A} and only 208 live young remained in 1300 nests. Of these nests only 17 of them had young actually in the nest. The remainder of the young birds were out on branches near the top of the canopy. Not once did I see an adult night heron.

Night herons are not big on nest sanitation. Most of the defecation occurs on part of the nest, the branches of the nest tree and the ground beneath. The canopy was thick enough to exclude most direct light. The height of the canopy seemed about twenty feet and the nests ranged from six feet from the ground to the canopy. I made no direct measurements. Predators such as racoons, foxes and muskrats are not a problem, as they are not common on the island since it lacks their suitable habitat⁷. Many trees and shrubs had multiple nests but

West Sister Island
lighthouse (right) on
June 26, 1982 & the view
from the top of that
lighthouse (below). The
black crowned night heron
colony is in the shorter
hackberry trees in the
foreground. The great
egret - great blue heron
colony is in the taller
hackberry trees in the
background. The darker-
green taller group of
trees in the center of
the black-crowned
night heron area are
the chokecherry trees
containing the cattle
egret nests.



I did not note an average number per tree. Although there was noise inside the colony from the young there was not the deafening sounds noted by some authors^{8A}. The most noise I recall occurred at the approach of one of the young and resembled a harsh, coarse sound like chuck, chuck-a-chuck, chuck, chuck. Some young as you passed underneath them hidden in the canopy did regurgitate their meal onto you. Most missed. The limb clambering ability of some had lead to their deaths as evidenced by their bodies hung in the fork of a branch. I counted 21 dead birds hung in various trees. Other fatalities obvious were 16 dead young in various nests and 11 dead young on the ground. Very few live birds were on the ground. Surprising for so much climbing around. Including the dead I counted 256 young.

I assumed this was the last of the summer young. Black-crowned night herons copulated on the average of nineteen days after their average arrival date on Long Island and then laid their first eggs an average of 3.3 days later^{9A}. The average clutch size is 3-5 eggs^{10A}. Incubation begins with the first egg and lasts for 24-26 days^{8B}. Lou Campbell puts the average arrival date in the Toledo area at March 25⁵. This aged most of the young in the West Sister colony at about 7 weeks during my census. Yet Palmer^{6A} stated that young night herons first fly at about six weeks and these young I saw did not fly but they must have been close. There was no evidence on Long Island of second broods^{9B}.

I had brought with me two spray cans of paint: blue and silver. I also carried a note tablet ruled for seven columns with twenty-five rows per page. As I encountered a tree with a nest I marked a box on my tablet page with an appropriate code and then marked the tree with a small silver dot to show me that I had counted the nests in that tree. There is real difficulty with losing your direction and sometimes a sense of time inside the canopy. I simply kept working over the night heron area of the island marking my tablet and tree spotting at random until I started to come upon trees I had previously spotted. This occurred about the same time that my time ran out (8 hours) but by that time I was convinced it was going to be difficult to find unspotted trees. The total results: 1300 black-crowned night heron nests and 16 great egret nests were counted in this black-crowned night heron area. This means that 2600 black-crowned night herons were present on the island in 1982 assuming that each nest was occupied. The chance of some nests being last years nests not used in the present year seems remote due to the appearance of fresh whitewash on most nests and the fact that most night herons frequently tear apart old nests and use the remains to construct new ones each year in the same tree or a site not far remote^{8C}.

While censusing the night heron colony I found a small cattle egret colony.

CATTLE EGRET

I believe this was the same colony I had seen the week before as it was in the same general location but the growth of the young in one week seemed remarkable. (Later when I saw a picture ^{11A} of the size difference between 5,7 and 9 day old cattle egret chicks, it was not remarkable). These were the only white young other than great egrets that I had seen during the census. However, young great egret bills are yellow whereas these were black-billed.