

teen miles north of Jackson, Michigan, and came to a brushy pond that touched the railway embankment on the west. This little pond is about 250 by 200 feet in size and there is timber on all sides except on the west. The margins of the pond are marshy but not brushy.

As I approached the pond a Bittern came over the heavy timber from the east and circled the pond on set wings, alighting about forty yards from me at the edge of the water. For a few minutes he assumed the erect stake-like pose and then began walking toward me along the margin of the pond in practically full view. The axis of his body was nearly horizontal with the neck and head raised somewhat. Before he had walked many yards the white nuptial plumes began showing at each 'shoulder.' He was moving toward me with a stately tread, the plume area gradually widening until the plumes appeared to meet across the back and to project about three inches beyond the brown feathers. The plumes were carried in a position nearly horizontal; that is they were not raised much above the contour of the back.

When the Bittern had approached within about thirty yards of me he raised his neck and head and I saw that the nearly white feathers on the throat from the base of the lower mandible downward some three inches were raised so that they projected straight out like a brush.

While the Bittern was approaching he continually uttered a throaty somewhat chirping call; *chu-peep, chu-peep*. The first syllable of the call being low and the second not loud. Mr. Verdi Burtch, of Branchport, N. Y., tells me that he has heard the Bittern utter a somewhat similar sound.

I now discovered the female Bittern at a distance of about twenty-five yards from me. Apparently she had been there all the time. As the male came up to her he raised his body to an erect position and strutted about her, all the while facing her. The female had now assumed an erect position, but not the 'frozen' attitude. However as the female knew of my presence she soon terminated the scene by rising in the air, the male following and also a third Bittern which had been near where the male had first alighted. This bird returned to the same spot in a minute or two, while the two courting Bitterns circled the pond high in the air for a minute and then flew off over the forest.

Owing to the lateness of the season I thought possible the ceremony was one of nest relief, but a search revealed no nest.

There was little to obstruct my view from the railway embankment, eight feet above the marsh, the light was over my shoulder and my 8x binocular was on the male Bittern during the whole performance.—WILLIAM G. FARGO, *Jackson, Mich.*

Cory's Least Bittern.—The A. O. U. Committee on Nomenclature has (Auk, XL, 1923, p. 524) seen fit to eliminate Cory's Least Bittern, (*Ixobrychus neoxenus*), from the 'Check-List,' basing its action on Bangs (Auk, XX XII, 1915, p. 483) and others who regard it as but a color

phase of *I. exilis*. In view of the commonness of dichromatism in the Herons and their allies, this action has, at first glance, the appearance of being justifiable. However there are factors in the case that do not seem to have been considered at their full value.

Practically every specimen of *I. neoxenus* so far taken has presented more or less traces of albinism. Sometimes it is in only a stray feather or so but again it is in large, conspicuous, irregular patches. These feathers or patches are pure white and not cream or other tints and they occur irregularly over the body even where in *exilis* the plumage is strongly colored or black. They are therefore true albinisms and not mosaic retentions or reversions to *exilis* characters or indications of hybridism. If *neoxenus* is a melanotic form of *exilis* it does not seem possible that it can at the same time be an albino, for melanism and albinism are mutually antagonistic tendencies and it is difficult to conceive of their occurring concurrently in the same individual,—especially in a great majority of individuals. The history of the form so far as is known is also suggestive of independence between the two. The Common Least Bittern is wide spread and occurs commonly in all suitable habitats within its range and does not seem to have shown any marked diminution of numbers in late years. If Cory's Least Bittern is but a phase of the Common Least Bittern we would expect it to occur in small but fairly constant numerical proportion wherever the latter occurred. On the contrary, except for single sporadic records rarely repeated, Cory's Bittern has occurred in only two limited localities,—certain stations in Florida and in the marshes of Toronto Bay, Ontario. Progressively and as the latter locality has been reclaimed, industrialized and destroyed as a marsh bird habitat, Cory's Bittern has practically disappeared from sight. In fact it does not seem that in occurrence, except in similarity of habitat, Cory's Bittern has any connection or correlation with the common form. Indications point to its being a distinct species, probably at the time of discovery in process of disappearance, reduced to the single breeding colony at Toronto and wintering in the marshes of Florida. The general albinism exhibited is probably the result of inbreeding or of the physical deterioration that caused the primary failure of the species. The few occurrences elsewhere than in the localities mentioned are merely the wandering stragglers that occur in any species. That they form a rather large percentage of the total number of the species may be due to the fact that they mark the original wider range of the species or the results of an imperfect migratory instinct accompanying general physical degeneracy.—P. A. TAVERNER, *National Museum of Canada, Ottawa, Canada.*

[While the status of Cory's Least Bittern will probably always remain a matter of personal opinion, Mr. Taverner's argument that its local occurrence is evidence against melanism does not seem well taken since black squirrels (melanistic gray squirrels) are well known to be local as well as the so called "*Buteo harlani*," a melanistic Red-tailed Harsh.—Ed.]