

**Winter dormitory of the Roadrunner, *Geococcyx californicus*, in west Texas.**—The use of nests for roosting is well-documented for many birds, particularly for wrens and for certain tropical and subtropical species (Skutch, *Anim. Kingdom*, 59: 50, 1956), but apparently the use of a nest for purposes other than rearing a brood has not been reported for the Roadrunner. The nest described here was occupied by a Roadrunner for at least 2 months during the late winter of 1971 and was abandoned several weeks before the nesting season. It was in itself somewhat unusual because it was in a habitat this species seldom favors for nesting.

The nest was under the eaves of a house a few miles outside of Lubbock, Texas. Although within 100 m of mesic pastures and canyons commonly frequented by Roadrunners, the house is one of several grouped closely together in a suburban development. Perhaps of particular interest is that the eave with the nest faced the adjoining house less than 7 m away, and was above a rather heavily used carport. The nest is assumed to have been built by House Sparrows, *Passer domesticus*, a pair of which occupied it after the Roadrunner vacated it. Neither the House Sparrow nor the Roadrunner was observed building the nest.

The Roadrunner was first seen in the nest on 11 February and remained until 3 April, when it moved to the undeveloped land nearby. The date it ended its occupancy coincided with the last period of cold weather (approximately 40° F) for Lubbock County that spring. The bird spent the nights and much of each day in the nest, though it generally left the nest when disturbed.

The Roadrunner typically nests in bushes or low trees. The nest reported here was in a niche formed by the eaves of the carport and was 3.5 m from the ground, more in accordance with the occasional reports of Roadrunners that nest in caves on the sides of cliffs (Colvin, *Auk*, 52: 88, 1935) or around man-made structures, such as oil derricks (Bent, *U. S. Natl. Mus.*, Bull. 176, 1940, p. 40). A report of a Roadrunner roosting in a chicken house (Bailey, *Birds of New Mexico*, Santa Fe, New Mexico Dept. Fish and Game, 1928, p. 312) is plausible, but would seem to need verification as it was not reported first hand.—MICHAEL KENT RYLANDER, *Department of Biology, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409*. Accepted 28 Oct. 71.

**Herons leaving the water to defecate.**—Brackbill (*Wilson Bull.*, 78: 316, 1966) reported that when Common Egrets (*Egretta alba*) and Snowy Egrets (*E. thula*) need to defecate, they leave the water in which they are hunting and move onto the shore. After defecating they return to the water and resume foraging. Similar behavior has been reported for shorebirds (Charadriiformes) by Reynolds (*Brit. Birds*, 58: 348, 1965) and by Brackbill (*Auk*, 87: 160, 1970). During studies on herons in North America (1965 and 1966) and on the Reef Heron (*E. sacra* in Australia 1967–70) we recorded defecation behavior as part of our routine observations on foraging herons. We have records for nine species of herons and, while these generally agree with Brackbill's (1966) observations, they show some interesting differences.

In 36 of 60 occasions the heron left the place in which it was foraging, defecated, and returned to resume foraging (Table 1). We observed this behavior in all nine species and it is essentially the same as Brackbill (1966) reported. Even when a bird is hunting far from the nearest land it will leave and fly to it in order to defecate (22 of the 36 observations). On only 2 occasions of the 36 did a bird move to some place else in the water to defecate. In 3 instances the bird defecated in flight and in the remaining 9 instances the bird was close to the shore and walked onto land to defecate. On

TABLE 1  
DEFECATION BEHAVIOR OF HERONS

Species <sup>1</sup>	Behavior		
	Leaves and then defecates	Defecates and then leaves	Defecates and remains
<i>Butorides virescens</i>	1	—	—
<i>Hydranassa caerulea</i>	6	7	1
<i>Hydranassa tricolor</i>	3	1	—
<i>Hydranassa rufescens</i>	1	3	4
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	12	2	3
<i>Egretta thula</i>	6	—	—
<i>Egretta alba</i>	4	—	2
<i>Ardea herodias</i>	1	1	—
<i>Ardea occidentalis</i>	2	—	—
TOTAL	36	14	10

<sup>1</sup> Scientific names follow Bock (Amer. Mus. Novitates, No. 1779, 1956).

four occasions defecation followed an aggressive encounter with another heron, but with the bird proceeding to a land area before defecating.

Different from the preceding behavior were 14 instances in which a foraging heron defecated and then left to resume foraging at another place. In 12 of these 14 instances the bird immediately flew and in the other 2 it walked away rapidly. On 10 occasions, or 1 out of 6 times, a foraging heron defecated and continued foraging. In all instances where a foraging bird defecated and continued hunting, it was a bird whose normal foraging movements shortly took it away from the place where it had defecated. The heron that most frequently defecated and remained was the Reddish Egret (*Hydranassa rufescens*), the most active hunter of the herons we have observed.

The reasons for these particular sanitary habits remain obscure. With the exception of the Great Blue (*Ardea herodias*) and Great White (*A. occidentalis*) Herons, the majority of herons we studied moved as they hunted. The chances that their droppings would alarm prey and interfere with hunting are therefore remote. Equally difficult to visualize are arguments that the behavior lessens the chances of parasitic infection. In half the observed instances of defecation (29 of 60), the droppings were placed in the water, but tide and current prevent the droppings accumulating in the marine habitats where our studies were made.

Indeed, our difficulty in explaining this behavior may arise because we have studied herons mostly in marine habitats. In freshwater habitats, especially small ponds or marshes, a very significant benefit may accrue from depositing droppings on the land. Our observations indicate that individual herons have well-defined foraging areas (in some instances, foraging territories) and return to these places each day. We have no reason to believe that herons hunting in freshwater habitats behave any differently from the same species in marine areas, and it is easy to see how in a freshwater situation dropping feces in the water could greatly increase the chance of parasitic infection or drive their prey from the areas most frequented by herons. Thus while the behavior of leaving a productive foraging area to deposit feces on the land or to avoid droppings placed in the water may seem unnecessary in marine habitats, it should be highly advantageous in freshwater habitats. As most herons frequent both marine and freshwater habitats, it is to be expected that they would show this behavior in both places.—HARRY F. RECHER and JUDY A. RECHER, *Department of Environmental Studies, The Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia*. Accepted 27 Dec. 71.