

Mahan, Larry Masters, Harold F. Mayfield, Virginia Mayfield, Douglas S. Middleton, Ray Perez, Bruce E. Radabaugh, Lawrence A. Ryel, Eric Schneider, Jean Skellenger, Robert G. Strong, Lawrence H. Walkinshaw, Oscar Warbach, Harold Wing, and Mark A. Wolf.—HAROLD F. MAYFIELD, 9235 River Road, Waterville, Ohio 43566. Accepted 15 Aug. 72.

Albinism in a population of Blue Jays.—Published records of banded Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*) indicate that individuals may live 15 years in a restricted locality, and that migrants may return to the same area for several subsequent breeding seasons. Therefore it is plausible to assume that the recessive gene for albinism has persisted for at least 45 years in a population of Blue Jays in the West End residential section of Nashville, Tennessee, substantiated by my records of four occurrences from 1927 through 1972:

In 1927 a newly fledged albino Blue Jay was caught in the West End and raised by A. C. Webb (photograph of the bird appeared in "Nashville Banner" 27 August 1927). It died and was mounted.

On 14 June 1959 I was given two fledglings just off the nest and captured on a nearby lawn. I hand-raised them with two unrelated normal Blue Jays. They were less vigorous and died in 1960.

On 29 May 1972 I was given three more fledglings caught on a lawn. One was very weak and died immediately. The two survivors are acquiring first winter plumage (August 1972).

On 25 August 1972 a fully developed albino Blue Jay of unknown age was trapped as it fed on grain in a residence yard. I received it on 28 August. It will be released.—AMELIA R. LASKEY, 1521 Graybar Lane, Nashville, Tennessee 37215. Accepted 5 Sep. 72.

Least Bittern nesting colonially.—Unlike most herons, bitterns are considered to be noncolonial nesters. Literature records of the nesting dispersion of the Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) support this view. Beecher (1942) reported densities ranging from 1 nest in 39.87 acres (0.06 nests per ha) to 4 nests in 1.38 acres (1.7 nests per ha) with an average density of 1 nest per 2.54 acres (1 nest per ha). Kent (1951) found 19 nests in 44 acres of marsh (1.1 nests per ha), one of which was from a second nesting. Wood (1951) reported that W. Koelz found 15 nests in 2 acres of rushes (18.5 nests per ha). Weller (1961), who found 62 nests in 83 acres (1.8 nests per ha), considered Wood's report exceptional. Later, Weller and Spatcher (1965) found 5 nests in 3 10,000 ft² quadrats (5.1 nests per ha), the result of exceptionally favorable habitat conditions.

In southern Florida the Least Bittern is a common resident of the Everglades marshes nesting primarily in sawgrass (*Mariscus jamaicensis*) and cattail (*Typha* spp.). On 12 April 1972 I found an unusually high concentration of active nests in Shark Valley Slough, Everglades National Park. The nesting aggregation was 50 m west of a canal and levee in a habitat typical of the southern Everglades, stretches of medium height (2 m) sawgrass, known as strands, interspersed with open marsh composed primarily of spikerush (*Eleocharis cellulosa*) and pickerelweed (*Pontedaria lanceolata*). The bitterns nested within the strands of tall sawgrass, using the vertical sawgrass blades for support, but making the nests entirely of spikerush leaves. Boat-tailed Grackles (*Cassidix mexicanus*), Common Gallinules (*Gallinula chloropus*), King Rails (*Rallus*

elegans), Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), and Green Herons (*Butorides virescens*) also nested in these sawgrass strands.

Five sawgrass strands in the area were searched carefully for bittern nests three times during April 1972. Four of these contained from 0 to 3 Least Bittern nests while one, covering 260 m², contained 11 active nests and a number that were inactive and presumably abandoned. Considering only active nests, this is equivalent to a density of 423 nests per ha, a figure far greater than any nesting density previously reported for the species. The mean distance between each active nest and the nest closest to it was 2.7 m (range 1.0–6.1 m). Weller (1961) noted several cases of two active nests within 15–20 feet of each other. The mean distance found in the Everglades was less than this, and the closest nests were only 1 m apart.

The reasons why Least Bitterns nested in such a high density are not known precisely. Such densities do not seem to be characteristic of the Everglades, although it is not unusual to find two nests within several meters of each other. Possibly food availability is involved. The colony site was one of the few parts of the southern Florida wetlands where water remained through the severe drought of 1970–71. Such bodies of standing water persisting through periods of low rainfall provide refugia for aquatic animals (Kushlan 1972). The prolonged submersion undoubtedly encouraged the preservation and subsequent reproduction of the small vertebrate prey of the Least Bittern.

Bitterns may have concentrated in the area during the drought and remained to breed. Although this would account for the large number of Least Bitterns seen throughout the area, it would not explain why a high nesting density was found in only one of five strands examined. The strand containing the colony was adjacent to a 142-ha tract of sawgrass that burned 16 March 1972 (J. C. Ogden, pers. comm.). One of the important aspects of fire in the Everglades is that concentrations of ibis and herons often feed extensively in recently burned areas. Although the food and feeding sites of the bitterns were not studied, I did see adults fly from the colony to the burned tract during the day. Possibly the burn provided a uniquely suitable feeding ground for the birds already concentrated in the area by the recent drought.

It appears therefore that colonial nesting does occur in the Least Bittern under certain circumstances, which may be related to the existence of localized feeding areas. I thank C. F. Douthit for help in locating the nesting assemblage and J. C. Ogden, O. T. Owre, W. B. Robertson, and M. W. Weller for criticizing the manuscript.

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- JAMES A. KUSHLAN, *Department of Biology, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida 33124.* Accepted 11 Sep. 72.