

GENERAL NOTES

The Greater and Lesser Yellow-legs as fish eaters.—That small fish form a food item acceptable to the Greater Yellow-legs (*Totanus melanoleucus*), has long been known. Peabody (1839), Bartsch (1899), Clark (1905), Danforth (1925), Bent (1927), Trautman (1940), Cottam (1943), and others have furnished convincing evidence that this species not infrequently eats minnows and other small fish. Whether the Lesser Yellow-legs (*Totanus flavipes*) has a similar inclination has seemed much less certain.

Most shore birds and a surprising number of land and tree birds occasionally eat fish. Milton B. Trautman wrote (letter, Dec. 1, 1943), that the Gizzard Shad (*Dorosoma cepedianum*) constituted the principal source of food of the Greater Yellow-legs at Buckeye Lake, Ohio; on only one occasion, however, did he find a Lesser Yellow-legs feeding on fish; and, away from Buckeye Lake, he only once found the Greater Yellow-legs feeding on fish. It was a question, therefore, whether the fish-eating habit of this species was primarily a local characteristic.

To determine whether this habit is local, common, or seasonal, and to ascertain the relative importance of fish in the diet of these two interesting shore birds, we have studied the food-habits records of the Fish and Wildlife Service. We found that 703 stomachs of the Greater, and 771 stomachs of the Lesser, Yellow-legs had been analyzed in the Service's laboratory at Washington, D.C. (now at the Patuxent Research Refuge, Bowie, Maryland). Percentages were based upon the standard volumetric or bulk method as outlined by Cottam (1936).

Since a bulletin on the food habits of our shore birds is expected to be prepared after the war, only the fish food is considered here. As might be expected, the fish consumed were usually of the small, sluggish, shallow-water species that are of little or no direct concern to the angler or to the commercial fisherman. Our studies further revealed that fish were taken at all seasons of the year, but, probably because of difference in availability, the degree to which the fish entered into the birds' diet varied in different localities and sections of the country.

It was surprising to discover that 419 (59.6 per cent) of the 703 Greater Yellow-legs had made all or part of their last meal on fish; 204 (29 per cent) had made their entire meal on fish; and 86 (12.2 per cent) had consumed fish to the extent of 75 to 99 per cent of the meal. Fish constituted approximately 44.5 per cent of the average meal of the total 703 birds and 74.6 per cent of the average meal of the 419 birds that had eaten fish during their last meal.

Of the 771 Lesser Yellow-legs, 142 (18.4 per cent) had made at least a part of their last meal on fish; 25 (3.2 per cent) had nothing but fish in their stomachs; and 54 (7 per cent) had fed on fish to the extent of 75 to 99 per cent of the meal. Fish constituted 10.6 per cent of the average meal of the 771 Lesser Yellow-legs and 57.5 per cent of the average meal of the 142 birds that had fed on fish during their last meal.

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