

Field reports - ^{Fall} ~~summer~~ 1993

Jim Dinmore

On 9 August 1993 from 6:15-6:45 p.m. I stopped at the Martin Marietta quarry east of Marshalltown to see if Cattle Egrets were still there. Mike Stegman of Garwin had told me in mid July that he had seen Cattle Egrets flying to and from a small island in the middle of the quarry and he thought they might be nesting.

In the 30 minutes I watched, I saw at least 29 Cattle Egrets fly to the island. Several groups of 5-8 birds flew in as well as a number of singles. All of the birds I looked at were in breeding plumage with bright buffy-orange patches of feathers on the back and breast. Their bills were orange except for one that appeared to be bright red, a color the species shows briefly during the breeding season.

The birds generally landed briefly on the tops of some of the low willows that covered the island and then dropped lower in the trees where they were out of sight. Some left the island while I watched so it was hard to keep track of the numbers but I believe that I was conservative and probably more than 30 birds were present. One bird picked up a thin stick about 15 inches long and then dropped out of sight in the vegetation. What convinced me that the birds were nesting was one group of three birds that I could see low in the vegetation at the east end of the island. One bird was clearly an adult and stood several feet from the other two. Those two birds seemed to be standing on a platform of sticks that was only a few feet above ground level. Both of those birds were close to the size of the adult bird and had white plumage that appeared to be somewhat "frizzy" on the head, as if there was still some down attached to the ends of the contour feathers. One of those birds had a bill that was clearly not orange (as it was on virtually all of the other birds I looked at) but rather appeared to be black. I watched these birds for some time and am convinced that they were nestlings that were close to leaving the nest.

The only other bird I saw on the island was one adult Black-crowned Night-Heron. A number of Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets flew by and joined others that were perched on some piles of sand several hundred yards from the island. I counted at least 21 great blues and 9 egrets on these piles.

Cattle Egrets were found in record numbers all over Iowa this summer so finding them nesting was not unexpected. The site, an island that was about 30-40 yards long and covered with willows up to perhaps 10-12 feet tall, appeared to be ideal for the species.

Since I did not have a boat to visit the island, I have no idea how many nests were present or even if there were others. However, by the bird's behavior, I strongly suspect that there were other nests hidden in the vegetation.

Tom - Please excuse the wordiness on all this, I stopped here on my way back from visiting you and wrote up these notes when I got home. I put in lots of details since I wasn't sure who else had seen the birds, the nests weren't obvious to me, and I thought someone might use them for a note in IBh. For Field reports, it boils down to.

Cattle Egret - at least 29 adults flying to island in quays near Marshalltown,
Nestlings and some nesting behavior noted. 9 August 1993 JJD

Jmm