

Third Nesting of Cattle Egret in North Dakota

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On 25 June 1979 a Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) nest with 3 recently hatched young was photographed at Kraft Slough, 8 miles east of Oakes in Sargent County, North Dakota. This finding establishes the third nesting area for the species in the State and represents a first nesting record for Sargent County. Cattle Egrets were probably active at the slough in previous years, as an area resident related seeing white egrets sitting on the backs of her cattle several years ago during most of the summer (Benzel pers. comm.). However, they did not become established, as Krapu and Duebbert (1974) did not report any Cattle Egrets in their intensive study of Kraft Slough and none were observed by the author during 1977 and 1978 studies in the area.

The Cattle Egret is a very recent nester in North Dakota. Jones and Malcolm (1978) reported 15 breeding pair in 1976 at J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge, McHenry County, for the first nesting record in the State. Two nests were found in 1978 at Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Burleigh County, (Schmidt 1979), and in 1979 Kraft Slough was added to the known breeding range.

In 1979 Cattle Egrets were still present at both J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge (Giese pers. comm.) and Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge. While Cattle Egrets are still not common breeders in the State, they certainly should not be considered accidental.

A discussion of the species' rapid expansion from the first North American breeding record in Florida in 1953 can be found in Palmer (1962), Crosby (1972), and Hjertaas (1979). Cattle Egret records of regional interest include Minnesota (Green and Janssen 1975), South Dakota (Waldstein 1977), and Saskatchewan (Hjertaas 1979). The egrets have now become well established at Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern South Dakota, and an estimated 200 Cattle Egrets were produced there in 1979 (Schultz pers. comm.).

In North Dakota all Cattle Egret nests have been in either marsh cattails or bulrushes over 500 m from associated uplands. The egret nests were all found among nesting Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*). These heronries were further associated with breeding colonies of Franklin's Gulls (*Larus pipixcan*). Elsewhere in North America, Cattle Egrets nest in both salt and fresh water areas, and commonly build nests in shrubs and trees (Palmer 1962).

Limited nest data include a nest with 3 eggs found on 22 July 1978 at Long Lake and by 3 August the eggs had hatched (Schmidt 1979). At Kraft Slough the young egrets were judged to be less than a week old when first found on 25 June

1979. Cattle Egrets at J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge were close to fledging by late July 1978 (Schmidt 1979). The first flight of the Kraft Slough nestlings was observed on 31 July. In 1978, neither of the 2 egret nests at Long Lake had fledged by our last visit to the area of 17 August, but both were very near fledging.

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