

9. SOME NOTES ON THE INDIAN REEF HERON

The Indian Reef Heron is found throughout the maritime habitat of Gujarat. In Kathiawar peninsula I have observed it in its central portion and along the Kutch coast. It is, however, not restricted to the coast. The breeding season is a prolonged one commencing from February and ending about August depending upon local conditions. The peak season appears to be from March to May.

The two most prominent phases of this heron are, the white and slaty-grey forms which vary from sooty to grey. Both sexes are seen in these phases. I have seen pairing of white with white and slaty with slaty as the more common combinations. Nevertheless, I have seen white $\times$ slaty and vice versa and with grey forms. In the Gulf of Cambay the slaty forms are seen more. What is surprising is that although both parents may be slaty, their young may be white or mixed and the same with white parents, or both young may be slaty or slaty and white in the same nest. Some of the slaty and grey forms have white patches on one or both wings in adults and young alike. All these varied phases may sometimes be seen in one Heronry, the genetics of which require scientific study. The young of white forms often have black or grey featherings but slaty young do not invariably have this pattern. The fledglings of the dark slaty form are usually light grey colour with whitish underparts. I have seen groups of white forms frequently in the Gulf of Kutch and North-west Kathiawar than in South-east Kathiawar.

The composition of a breeding colony is that the species prefers to nest together and may monopolise an entire tree, yet, I have seen them nesting with other herons, storks, white ibises and cormorants. The trees select-

ed depend upon the suitability of the site and I have even seen them nesting in Neem trees. Trees in which large Fruit Bats roost are used by all the above mentioned birds but not cormorant.

The white form of the Reef Heron is easily distinguished from the Little Egret by its stouter bill, colour of lowest mandible and also posture.

The nesting in trees or groups of trees by this heron in urban areas is preferred probably because of suitability of type of trees and closeness to their feeding grounds. Nevertheless, I have seen them nesting away from urban areas throughout the coast where there were mangrove forests, now denuded or heavily cut in many places and to provide browse for camels and fuel-wood. There is no doubt that in such sites the breeding is later, from May onwards.

In the littoral, especially in the Gulf, I find sea-food abundant for shore birds and reef herons take full advantage of the situation specially during spring tides when tides in the gulf have high incidence of rise and fall. A very interesting observation during the breeding season in the gulf especially in the muddy and murky silted waters and in estuaries is the feeding behaviour. Most of the food gathered is during the ebbing, ebb and flow of tides and not during full flood at which time there is a marked lull in feeding of young in the heronry. At full tide, the mud flats and sands are covered by water and feeding habitat though it may appear extensive, food itself is submerged and in murky water in which it is less visible and more difficult to obtain. In monsoon, these herons visit jheels and tanks and streams although much of their food is taken in gulf, bays,

creeks and estuaries and consists of Mud-Skipper, Fish, Prawn, Crab, Eel and other marine and aquatic animal life, and in the vicinity of fishermen. Although, feeding of nestlings takes place at day and night, much depends upon tidal timings. The heronry as

mentioned by other writers is fairly silent. Crows are a scourge to nesting birds and yet the parents alternately guard their eggs and nestlings carefully. Predation by raptors is negligible but young that fall to ground are often killed by pariah dogs, cats and jackals.

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10. EXCEPTIONALLY LARGE EGGS OF THE COMMON HOUSE CROW, *CORVUS S. SPLENDENS* VIELL.

On 15th April 1982, I saw a pair of house crows (*Corvus s. splendens*) complete their nest in a copperpod tree in my garden at Kandivli, Salsette, in North Bombay.

For the next two days there appeared to be no activity around the nest but on the 18th April it contained one egg. This appeared extraordinarily large that I took it. Again for two days there was no activity and I thought that the nest was deserted. But on the 21st April morning there was another large egg which I took, to be followed by a third egg on the 22nd April.

The three eggs measured and weighed as follows :-

1.	47.55 x 25 mm.....	17 gm
2.	44.2 x 26.75 mm.....	15.5 gm
3.	43.55 x 25 mm.....	14.2 gm

Stuart Baker (1932) in NIDIFICATION OF BIRDS OF THE INDIAN EMPIRE (Vol. I, pp. 18) gives the average size of 200 eggs as 37.2 x 27 mm (maxima 44.1 x 27.4 mm and 41.1 x 29.1 mm; minima is 30.4 x 25.4 mm and 32.0 x 23.0 mm).

The eggs obtained by me thus are appreciably larger than those noted earlier and may be worth recording. I am sending the eggs for the Society's collection.

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11. LABORATORY OBSERVATIONS ON THE INCUBATION PERIOD OF THE INDIAN BLACK IBIS *PSEUDIBIS PAPILLOSA* (TEMMINCK)

(With a text-figure)

Ali and Ripley (1968) have mentioned that there is no record of the incubation period

of the Indian black ibis. In the course of our studies on Indian black ibis, we have been



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