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NOTES ON THE FIRST NEW MEXICO NESTING OF THE TRICOLORED HERON
AND THE STATUS OF THE SPECIES IN THE STATE

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The Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*) was first recorded in New Mexico in September 1951 in Chaves County (Hubbard 1978). Subsequently there were nine additional reports of the species, all from the lower Rio Grande and Pecos River valleys and nearby sites between April and September, except for a single bird at Harroun Lake, Eddy County in December, 1965 until 1978. Additional sightings since 1978 and the discovery of the first nest in New Mexico are described in this report.

During the summer of 1978 large numbers of Snowy Egrets (*Egretta thula*) and Black-crowned Night-Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) were noted in flight in the Salt Lake area along State Highway 128 approximately 18 km northeast of Loving, Eddy County. Because of the large number of birds involved, I suspected that a large heronry was located at one or more of the numerous salt lakes. I found the heronry on 9 May 1979 at Lindsey Lake and since that time over 1600 nestling

Snowy Egrets, Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), and Black-crowned Night-Herons have been banded. During the 1979-82 nesting seasons at least one pair (two in 1980) of Little Blue Herons (*Egretta caerulea*) was also present with one nest found each year. Cattle Egrets were first noted in the heronry in 1980, but the first nests were not found until the following year when at least ten pairs were present. Before the discovery of the heronry, there had been only one previous record of nesting of the Little Blue Heron and Cattle Egret in New Mexico, both near Elephant Butte Lake, Sierra County, in July 1975 (Hubbard 1978).

The first Tricolored Heron recorded at the heronry was a single bird on 28 May 1979. The heronry was not visited after banding operations ceased in early July. On a August 1979, a group of four Tricolored Herons was seen flying in the direction of the heronry, about 4 km away. Two of the birds were adult plumaged and the other two were immatures. The species was not seen again in Eddy County in 1979. Search for an active nest was begun in 1980. The species was seen on four different occasions in Eddy County from 3 July to 31 August, but no nest was found.

The 1981 breeding season produced the first, albeit apparently unsuccessful, Tricolored Heron nest in New Mexico. The herons were present at the heronry from 28 April until at least 2 July. An apparently mated pair and a single, unaccompanied bird were seen to enter the heronry on 11 and 24 June. On 2 July while visiting the heronry I noticed a single Tricolored Heron staying near a group of nests on the western perimeter of the colony. I moved away from the colony and watched this particular bird as it moved closer to a nest about 1.5 m above the water. After a perching for a few minutes above the nest, it dropped down and sat on it. The nest contained four bluish-green unmarked eggs similar in size and appearance to Snowy Egret eggs but smaller than those of the Black-crowned Night-Heron. The nest was like the many others there--a bulky bowl composed mainly of mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) branches. I obtained several photographs of the adult standing above the nest and of the eggs. Because of concern about disturbing the nest, I did not return to the heronry until 17 July, at which time I found the Tricolored Heron nest to be empty. There was no sign of eggshells or of the adult in the heronry. The species was not seen again in 1981.

Although I have never seen such activity at the heronry, it is possible that a predator may have removed the eggs or young birds from the nest. Water levels fluctuate thus allowing predators access to nests located in shallower water. Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are common in the area and on 30 May 1981 I removed a Long-tailed Weasel (*Mustella frenata*) from the middle of the Lindsey Lake heronry. In addition, Chihuahuan Ravens (*Corvus cryptoleucus*) are common in the area and may occasionally remove eggs or nestlings. The only evidence of predation is a Snowy Egret wing observed in a nearby Harris' Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) nest.

One of the Tricolored Herons present in 1981 was a dark, melanistic individual. One of this color was noted earlier at Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Chaves County, which is about 135 km north of the heronry, from 25-29 April (Rosenberg, et al. 1981). A single dark individual was present at the heronry from 14 May through 24 June and presumably the same bird was at the Slab on the Pecos River, about 12 km southwest of the heronry on 19 June 1981.

During 1982, the heronry was thoroughly searched for Tricolored Herons and additional nests, but only single birds were seen (26 and 30 May). From 1982 to the present, Tricolored Herons have been seen occasionally throughout most summers, but another nest has not yet been found.

The Tricolored Heron is normally restricted to coastal areas, but it has been recorded nesting in North Dakota and Kansas (American Ornithologists Union 1983). The heronry is located about 830 km from the nearest coastline at Corpus Christi, Texas and about 680 km from the nearest nesting sites reported in Colorado and Austin Counties in Texas (Oberholser 1974). The egg date for this nest is later than the 23 June latest date given for Texas nests (Oberholser 1974). This nesting attempt may represent the highest elevation, at about 900 m, for a nest of this species.

Literature Cited

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BOARD MEETING NOTICE

The NMOS Board of Directors will meet 25 January at 1:00 PM in Room 163 of the UNM Biology Building. Items on the agenda will include; 1) Annual meeting update. 2) The adding of ad hoc directors. 3) Field Notes report. 4) Database report. 5) Revised NM Bird Finding Guide progress report. 6) Collecting review.

Board meetings are open to the membership.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE UPCOMING NMOS ANNUAL MEETING

This year for the first time a registration fee of \$5 will be charged. This fee will cover: Admission to the paper sessions and to the evening featured talk, coffee, AND admission to the Museum displays. Speakers and students will be exempt from the fee. Your badge will admit you to these activities.

Greg Farley reports that the paper sessions are shaping up nicely. He will accept abstracts, for a 15-20 minute talk, until 15 February. The abstracts will be published in the NMOS Bulletin. Send abstracts to Greg at the Department of Biology, UNM, Albuquerque, NM 87131.

Dr. Kit Matthew, Director of the Museum will give the first address of the morning paper session.

Dr. Peter Houde, Professor of Biology, NMSU, will give the first paper of the afternoon session.

The Awards Banquet (Chicken Cordon Bleu) will be held at the Old Town Sheraton at 7:00 PM. Members making significant contributions of their time to the organization during the past three years will be recognized, and three members (Drs. Zimmerman and Ligon) will receive Life Memberships.

At 8:15 PM Dr. J. David Ligon, UNM, will speak at the Museum on "The Evolution of Cooperation in Birds." Dr. James Findley will introduce Dr. Ligon.

A Sunday morning field trip to the Corrales Bosque Preserve will be led by Dr. James Findley, who was instrumental in getting the area protected.

SPECIAL NOTE: Those of you who remember the home-baked pastries at the 1990 meeting will be happy to know that Gloria Travis and Rose Brasel have volunteered again to bake for us!

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

The nominating committee, Dr. James Travis (Chair), Bo West and Pat Insley, present the following slate of officers for 1992-94:

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No further nominations have been received by the Secretary.

ATTENTION BIRDERS

Have you seen a Loggerhead Shrike with a colored leg band? Adult and nestling loggerheads have been color banded in Southwest Idaho. If you spot one this winter please contact; Chris Woods, Raptor Research Center, Boise State University, 1910 University Drive, Boise, Idaho 83725. Phone 208/385-3262.



NEW! MAILING ADDRESS NEW!

NMOS now has a permanent mailing address. Please use this address when mailing routine business to NMOS: your dues, requests for publications, change of your address, and other membership service matters.

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