

FOUR RARE SPECIES OF BIRDS IN INDIANA IN 1930

SIDNEY R. ESTEN, Conservation Department

During the summer of 1930 four species of birds once common but now rare were noted in the state.

The little blue heron, according to Robert Ridgeway, bred formerly in Knox and Gibson Counties. The american egret, according to Ridgeway was a common breeding species in the Lower Wabash and was also reported by several observers breeding in a number of Northern Indiana counties and especially in the Kankakee valley. The wood ibis, Ridgeway believed, formerly bred in the Lower Wabash. The sandhill crane, according to Brayton, was formerly a breeding species in the marshes of northern Indiana. Of late years, records of these four species in the state have been irregular as to occurrence and rare.

From August 1 to August 20, two sandhill cranes were often seen on the Wabash River and at the Newport Bridge, sometimes being seen on the Parke County side and sometimes on the Vermillion County side. They were reported by Mr. Bert Murray of Russelville.

A flock of sixteen wood ibis was found on Hovey Lake this summer from the middle of July until the first week in September. They were first reported to me by Mr. George Robinson, caretaker at the lake, who had one in captivity for several days. Mr. Lawrence Hicks and Mr. R. H. McCormick of Ohio University visited Hovey Lake on September 2 and took several pictures, copies of which, with a lantern slide, Mr. Hicks sent me.

The white "phase" of the little blue herons occurred in the state "in thousands" as several of the many reports stated. I have only one record of two adult little blue herons. I saw these two at Cayuga Lake in Vermillion County on August 20 together with 75 immature little blues, twelve American egrets, several big blues, a number of little greens and a number of black-crowned night herons. The lake, of about forty acres, was almost dry, with only several small shallow pond-like areas on the sun-dried lake bottom. In these the herons were feeding. The records of little blue herons in the white "phase" extend from July 13, when they were first seen near Crawfordsville, to September 10, when they were last reported at Hedley's Lake near Lafayette on September 10. Throughout the state over one hundred people have reported them from thirty counties and without doubt they have been in some numbers in every county of the state, during August, at least. The largest flocks reported were at Shakamak State Park, where several hundred were seen about August 1 by John Diggs and at Cayuga Lake in Vermillion County where I saw 75 on August 20. Reports along the lower Wabash and lower White River state that flocks varied from twenty to fifty birds. In most places they were in small flocks of from six to twenty. (Note Figure 1.)

The American egret was first recorded July 17 from Winamac and the last report was from Tippecanoe County on September 14. One report stated that a "pair of large white herons with six children (little white herons) were often seen on Webster Lake." Later reports verified these as being six little blues in white plumage and two American egrets. Egrets were reported this summer from nineteen counties of the state. (Note Figure 2.)

No records of the snowy egret were secured during the summer, although it is possible that among the great number of the white "phase" of the little blue herons seen a few might have been snowy egrets.

The occurrence of the little blue heron and the american egret is easily explained. The little blue herons in the white "phase" and the american egrets often wander northward after the breeding season in the south, but the northward migration this last summer was one of the greatest of recent years and was caused without a doubt by the exceptional, nation-wide drought of July and August. Other states of the Middle West have also reported a large migration into their states this summer of the same two species.

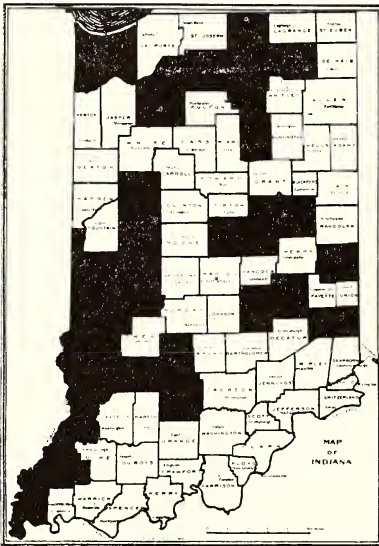


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Fig. 1. Shaded portions show counties in which the white phase or immature little blue herons were seen during summer of 1930 (July 13 to Sept. 10).

Fig. 2. Shaded portions show counties in which the American egrets were seen during the summer of 1930 (July 17 to Sept. 10).