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Bald Eagle Preys on Cattle Egret

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Bald Eagle preys on Cattle Egret.—There are few reports of Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) being preyed upon by native birds. Courser and Dinsmore (1971, Auk 88: 669) observed an adult Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) capture an adult Cattle Egret in Gilchrist County, Florida. Knight (1976, Fla. Field Nat. 4: 14) and Layne et al. (1977, Fla. Field Nat. 5: 1-4) reported several observations of Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) capturing Cattle Egrets in the air in central Florida.

On 7 March 1982 at approximately 1700, we observed an adult Bald Eagle capture an adult Cattle Egret. The pursuit lasted nearly 2 minutes and took place directly over U.S. Highway 441, 7 km north of the junction of U.S. 441 and S.R. 301, in Marion County, Florida. The eagle was first observed pursuing a small dark unidentifiable bird at a height of 45 m. The small bird flew erratically and avoided capture. After about 20 seconds, the Bald Eagle then turned toward a lone Cattle Egret that was passing 25-30 meters away. Immediately the egret began turning sharply while rising and falling in flight. The eagle remained either directly behind or slightly above the egret during the entire pursuit. It made several attempts to grasp the egret with its outstretched talons and eventually was successful when the Cattle Egret made a slow turn. Instead of immediately landing with the prey, the Bald Eagle flew in an easterly direction until it disappeared from view.

John Hintermister (pers. comm.) also observed a Bald Eagle capture a Cattle Egret, over Payne's Prairie State Preserve, Alachua County, Florida, in July of 1981. Though little is known of the potential importance of adult Cattle Egrets in the diet of predators, this egret appears to be taken opportunistically, in small numbers by Bald Eagles and other North American raptors.—MICHAEL L. JENNINGS and DAWN P. JENNINGS, *Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Wildlife Research Laboratory, 4005 South Main Street, Gainesville, Florida 32601.*

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Behavior of river otters by a water hole in a drought year.—Over a period of 3.5 weeks in January 1981, my wife and I watched river otters (*Lutra canadensis*) in a water hole dug for cattle at the Hendrie Ranch, 24 km S of Lake Placid, Highlands County, Florida. With its surface a meter below the level of the surrounding pasture, the hole made a pool measuring 8 x 20 m that was open to observation on all sides. The otter paid little attention to us as we watched it from distances of 20 m and less.

The only prey taken by the otter was the walking catfish (*Clarias batrachus*), an exotic species that has spread throughout south and central Florida (Courtenay et al. 1975, Environ. Conserv. 2:145-148). During our first observations on 4 January, the otter caught and ate eight catfish 15-30 cm long in one hour. None took more than a few seconds to catch. On 15 January we saw an otter catch and eat nine catfish in 2 h. It carried one catfish about 30 cm long into a thick bed of reeds, a behavior we also saw on four other mornings. The otter caught five fish in 58 min on 26 January and four in 154 min on the 27th, but by 3 February it was unable to catch any in 12 min.

When we visited the ranch in 1979, the water hole had been part of a body of water 2 ha in extent that covered a woodland swamp and adjacent marsh. It seemed that the drought affecting the area in 1981 had led to a concentration of catfish in the water hole. The otter and other predators had apparently