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Behavior of River Otters by a Water Hole in a Drought Year

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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

exhausted the supply in the course of about 18 days. Kushlan (1976, Auk 93: 464-476), in a study of seasonally fluctuating ponds, found that fish moved into them with the drying up of adjacent swamps. He noted that herons of several species reduced the biomass of fish concentrated in ponds with lowering levels by 76 percent. My observations suggested that the otters, more efficient than the waders in being able to move close to the shore as well as being able to dive into all parts of the pool, may have caught most of the walking catfish in the pool.

We thank James H. Hendrie for permitting us to study otters on his ranch and James N. Layne for his comments on the manuscript. Our observations were made while staying at the Archbold Biological Station.—LAWRENCE KILHAM, *Department of Microbiology, Dartmouth Medical School, Hanover, New Hampshire 03755.*

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REPORT

Summary of the 1982 Spring meeting.—It was with great enthusiasm that FOS members journeyed to Everglades National Park for the meeting of 16-18 April 1982 at the Flamingo Inn, and they were not disappointed. Field trips yielded Cape Sable Sparrows, eagles, anis, a tropical (?) kingbird, warblers, and waders. From the roundup to the roast, the programs excelled. Dr. Jack P. Hailman, University of Wisconsin, spoke on "Watching Bird Behavior", a perfect topic for FOS members; and Dr. John W. Fitzpatrick, Field Museum, took us from Florida to Peru in a comparison of insular habitats entitled "A Thousand 'Floridas'". Members were then able to ask questions on south Florida birds of a panel of specialists on the subject: Oron Bass, Paula Frohring, Jim Kushlan, Oscar Owre, and Bill Robertson. The skin quiz, courtesy of Oscar Owre, was won by Paul Sykes. A just for fun feature, the ornithological "weird quiz", courtesy of Paula Frohring, was won by Glen Woolfenden. Both winners were honored with prints of the superb photographs of Caution Singletary, whose work was on display at the meeting. Bob Loftin was given a photograph by Wes Biggs for having the best answer to the final essay question on the "weird quiz".

A beautiful sunset cruise preceded the banquet, which was superb, and the evening culminated in a roast of Bill Robertson. Roasters included Fred Lohrer, Oscar Owre, Jonnie Fisk, Glen Woolfenden, and Oliver Austin. This singular tribute was evidence of the esteem and affection in which he is held. Items of business included the election to Honorary Membership of Oliver L. Austin and Pierce Brodkorb, two pre-eminent men who we are privileged to have in Florida, and the appointment of James A. Kushlan as editor of the FFN, replacing Fred E. Lohrer who received a resolution of appreciation. Oron Bass and Bill Robertson will serve as associate editors. Fred Lohrer will be review editor. Lenore McCullagh and Phyllis Robertson are co-chairmen of the membership committee. In honor of the tenth anniversary of FOS, back issues of the FFN will be sold for \$1.50 in 1983. At the annual membership meeting, Mary Clench, Malcolm Simons, and Brooks Atherton were elected to the board. Bob Brown will be local chairman of the 22-24 October 1982 meeting in Titusville. We thank Jim Kushlan and his committee for an outstanding meeting.—BARBARA C. KITTLESON, Secretary.