

Cattle Egrets: "Birds? . . . little old men . . . pieces of paper . . ." The comments flew, but the birds did not, as six of us stared at Cattle Egrets. Twenty of them were grouped in the grassy yard at Wickes Lumber Company in Selkirk (Albany County) on April 30, and all were engaged in a cleanup, every one preening.

As the screech of a slow-moving train startled them, they leaped-frogged to the right, away from the tracks, and thus disturbed they began to feed. As a flock they worked along the ground after insects, occasionally ferreting out a nightcrawler. Like Robins, they braced their feet and tugged, dangling the huge worms a moment or ducking a covetous neighbor swallowed the prizes whole. When steadily feeding, they moved along so rapidly we almost had to sweep the scope to keep any one bird in view. After a few minutes one Egret lifted lightly over the high fence, and the others followed in two's and three's, to continue their searching in greener pastures.

All this time the flock had been drawing closer to us until they were only 25 feet away. At this range we could see three color variations, and noticed that the "yellow" bills were really light orange. Three of the twenty had Hallowe'en-corn bills and matching reddish legs. The tawny plumes of these three were deeper in color than those of the other birds. Four Egrets were very pale, showing almost no color on the back, and the head and breast feathers were corresponding lighter, bills yellow. We saw some dusky legs, and thought they belonged to the whiter birds.

The other thirteen looked alike, with yellowish legs and yellow bills. Their caps were sandy, and sandy plumes were both feathered across the upper backs and were seemingly clumped on the front of the long necks. The crowns lay smooth most of the time, but now and then a prickly crest was raised. All the birds had dusky feet.

These fascinating birds were about the size of Snowy Egrets, and like them, showed the crooked neck often pulled tight to the shoulders. In short flight they were beautiful, pure white of wing and spreading tail, more graceful than the Green Heron. It was amusing to watch them land nearby when the long legs swung forward from under the tails and the birds settled with a jerk. One more outstanding feature was the eye — yellow with a black rim around the iris, and deep-set close to the bill, giving the bird an air both stern and comical.

They paid little attention to us and so engrossed were we that we watched for an hour — and considered ourselves lucky indeed.

Mrs. George Budlong, who discovered the Egrets the morning of April 30 and kindly spread the alert, reported later "late in the afternoon I noticed most of them were resting with their heads lowered and only a few were eating, staying in a close group. Then about 6:30 p.m. they started moving around, spreading out and eating again. Finally, at 5 minutes to 7 they circled the field a few times and took off heading north and flying low".

On May 1 twelve Cattle Egrets were seen on Sunnyside Road, Scotia, in Schenectady County, and directly upriver from where the Egrets stopped in Selkirk.

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A Wintering Brown Thrasher: Although for several winters we have enjoyed special bird visitors, this winter was made especially exciting by having a Brown Thrasher spend many hours in a pine tree and under the picnic table just outside our back patio, and as a regular guest partake of our suet and bird seed.

We had watched a family of Brown Thrashers since last May, first noticing them in the early mornings, feeding on the back lawn or singing at dusk prior to a bedtime snack of insects. After they had raised two broods we saw less and less of the birds and after a very mild, balmy week-end in October we assumed that they had migrated. We were sorry to see them leave because the possibility of their return seemed remote for the brush row where they had nested was cleared by the caretaker of some neighboring property.

However, on Christmas morning my husband looked out at the snow glittering in the sunlight, and saw a Brown Thrasher just outside the window. It sat jauntily