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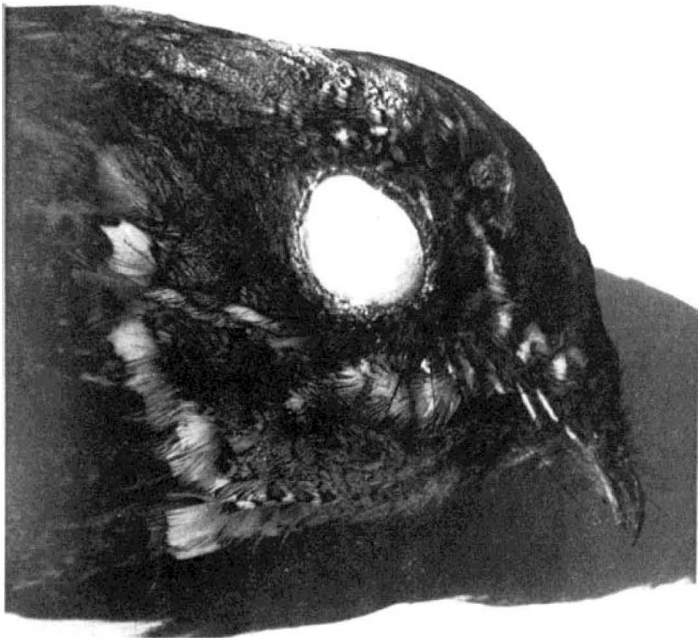
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No. 2

A CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW IN POSTNUPTIAL MOLT

BY GEORGE MIKSCH SUTTON

ON 28 JULY 1954, while I was presenting a course in ornithology at the University of Oklahoma Biological Station (campus about two miles east of the village of Willis, Marshall County, south-central Oklahoma), two students told me of seeing a "whip-poor-will" not far from the campus and handed me some feathers they had picked up in the "thicket" from which they had flushed the bird. One feather was instantly recognizable as a rectrix from a Chuck-will's-widow (*Caprimulgus carolinensis*), a bird widely known as the whip-poor-will in Oklahoma.



Specimen taken near Willis, Marshall County, Oklahoma on 28 July 1954. Note sheathing at base of rictal bristles between eye and bill. Photograph by Paul F. Nighswonger.

Curious as to why we had not been hearing a Chuck-will's-widow evening after evening, I asked the students to take me to the spot at which they had seen the bird.

The "thicket" proved to be a tangle of shrubbery, vines, roots, and dead branches at the bottom of a deep erosion gully leading from a strip of pastureland through scattered woods to the Buncombe Creek Arm of Lake Texoma. I had cautioned my class to keep back from the edge of this gully lest the bank give way with them. Occasionally we had crossed the gully, but never had we really explored it.

Choosing a place of descent with care, the two students and I clambered down to the very bottom. The bed of the gully was dry. Masses of earth had recently fallen away, exposing shaggy clusters of roots, but firm, well shaded parts of the banks were green with moss, small ferns, and liverworts. Parts of trees that had toppled in from time to time were overgrown with poison ivy.

As we picked our way down the streambed, we came to an abrupt turn. Here the bank to our right was almost vertical, but at its base was a low, narrow shelf of fine earth strewn with feathers. Had my companions not insisted that their "whip-poor-will" had flown from this spot an hour or so earlier that very day, I would have assumed that some predator had made a kill there. A short way below the turn a Chuck-will's-widow flew up, giving a low *quert* as it made off. We did not see the bird alight; but I followed it down the gully, flushed it again, and shot it as it headed for an opening between the bank and a fallen tree. It proved to be an adult female in the midst of its late summer molt. Its wings were ragged, its new tail far from full-grown, and its rictal bristles short and noticeably sheathed at the base (see photograph). This sheathing was of special interest to me, since it so definitely proved that the bristles were true feathers rather than hairs.

Returning to the place at which we had first flushed the bird, we found eight rectrices, many remiges, and great numbers of smaller feathers. With the rectrix the students had given me, we now had all of the molted tail except for one feather. Evidently the bird had been coming to this place day after day for some time while undergoing the molt or the molt had taken place very rapidly. How widely the bird had ranged in obtaining food during the molting period we could not say, but presumably it had ceased calling after the molt had started.

On spreading the wings we found that the only unmolted primary on each was the outermost. The feathers in the middle of the crown were darker and browner (less gray) than those at either side of the crown, but there seemed to be no way of ascertaining that these dark brown feathers were all new or that the gray feathers were all old. Each of the several rictal bristles was short and sheathed at the base (see photograph), as if the old ones had dropped out simultaneously and were being replaced in the same way.

The specimen (GMS 12195) was not fat (weight 117.1 grams). The ovary measured 5.5 x 3 mm. The shortest of the ten incoming rectrices measured about 40 mm., the longest 109. The shortest two were neither the outermost pair nor the innermost. Each rectrix was heavily sheathed at the base.

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THE CATTLE EGRET IN CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

BY JOHN G. NEWELL

THE CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) has thus far been formally reported from only three counties in Oklahoma—Alfalfa, Tulsa, and Cleveland (Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 32). Its summering in Tulsa County in 1962 and its breeding there in 1963 and 1964 have been carefully documented by John S. Tomer (1967, *Wilson Bull.*, 79: 245).

In central Oklahoma the species was first noted in the spring of 1964, when V. J. Vacin saw one at Silver Lake, in Oklahoma County, in the extreme north-western part of Oklahoma City; this sighting was never reported, since the exact date was not recorded in any way. In the spring of 1968 one to five Cattle Egrets frequented fairly high, dry pastureland about one and one-half miles west of Lake Overholser, in Canadian County, just east of the city of Yukon. Various observers saw enough of them to raise hopes that the birds would join the large Oklahoma City heronry and nest, thus establishing a breeding record for central Oklahoma.

In 1968 the Oklahoma City heronry occupied a grove of oaks on the north side of Northwest Twenty-third Street just west of Rockwell Road. Here Little Blue Herons (*Florida caerulea*), Common Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*), Snowy Egrets (*Leucophoyx thula*), and Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) bred in considerable numbers. The herons have been forced to move every few years as the trees have been bulldozed out to make room for housing developments.

Until recently the pastureland visited by the Cattle Egrets in 1968 was inhabited by a rapidly expanding colony of prairie dogs. The rodents allegedly ate so much grass that the owners of the herd of Black Angus cattle pastured there saw to it that the "dogs" were eliminated by poison.

On 18 May I found a single Cattle Egret feeding with the cattle on a gentle slope in the pasture. The following day several observers checked the area both morning and evening, seeing three Cattle Egrets on each visit. On subsequent days for about a week from one to three birds were seen with the cattle. On one occasion Jane Turner and Mary Coleman, both of Midwest City, Oklahoma, followed the egrets to the Oklahoma City heronry, but when Jack S. Roberts visited the heronry on 22 May he did not find any Cattle Egrets there.

I last saw the Cattle Egrets on 30 May. On this occasion five birds were in