

Cattle Egret

Bubulcus ibis

Formerly a native of Africa, Cattle Egrets underwent a remarkable range expansion during the 20th century, eventually spreading to all continents except Antarctica. As described by Crosby (1972), their North American populations increased dramatically between the late 1950s and early 1970s. Their continental populations have subsequently stabilized, and minor contractions have been noted near the extremities of their range which currently extends north to Maine, Ohio, Minnesota, Idaho, and California (AOU 1983).

In Ohio, the first Cattle Egret was discovered near Columbus in 1958. During the 1960s, nonbreeding individuals were observed fairly regularly along western Lake Erie with sporadic sightings elsewhere in the state (Peterjohn 1989a). The presence of summering Cattle Egrets along western Lake Erie during the 1970s produced suspicions that they were nesting in the area. These suspicions were proven to be correct when 20 nests were discovered in the large heronry on West Sister Island in 1978 (Kleen 1978).

In the early 1980s, West Sister Island hosted the only nesting colony of Cattle Egrets in Ohio. This population was reduced to 8–10 pairs by 1983, and fewer than five pairs by 1987. A few pairs were still believed to be nesting on the island in 1989. In addition to the colony on West Sister Island a second colony was discovered in 1984 on a small island in Sandusky Bay off the city of Sandusky (Erie County). This island has hosted 3–6 nesting pairs through 1989. Given their declining numbers, the future for breeding Cattle Egrets in Ohio appears to be tenuous at best.

These two small colonies represent the only remaining breeding Cattle Egrets in western Lake Erie. At one time, a small population also nested within the Canadian portion of the lake. In the mid-1970s, as many as 15 pairs nested on Pelee Island while other pairs nested on East Sister Island. These colonies were abandoned before 1980. There have been no confirmed Canadian nests since the abandonment of these two colonies (Cadman et al. 1987).

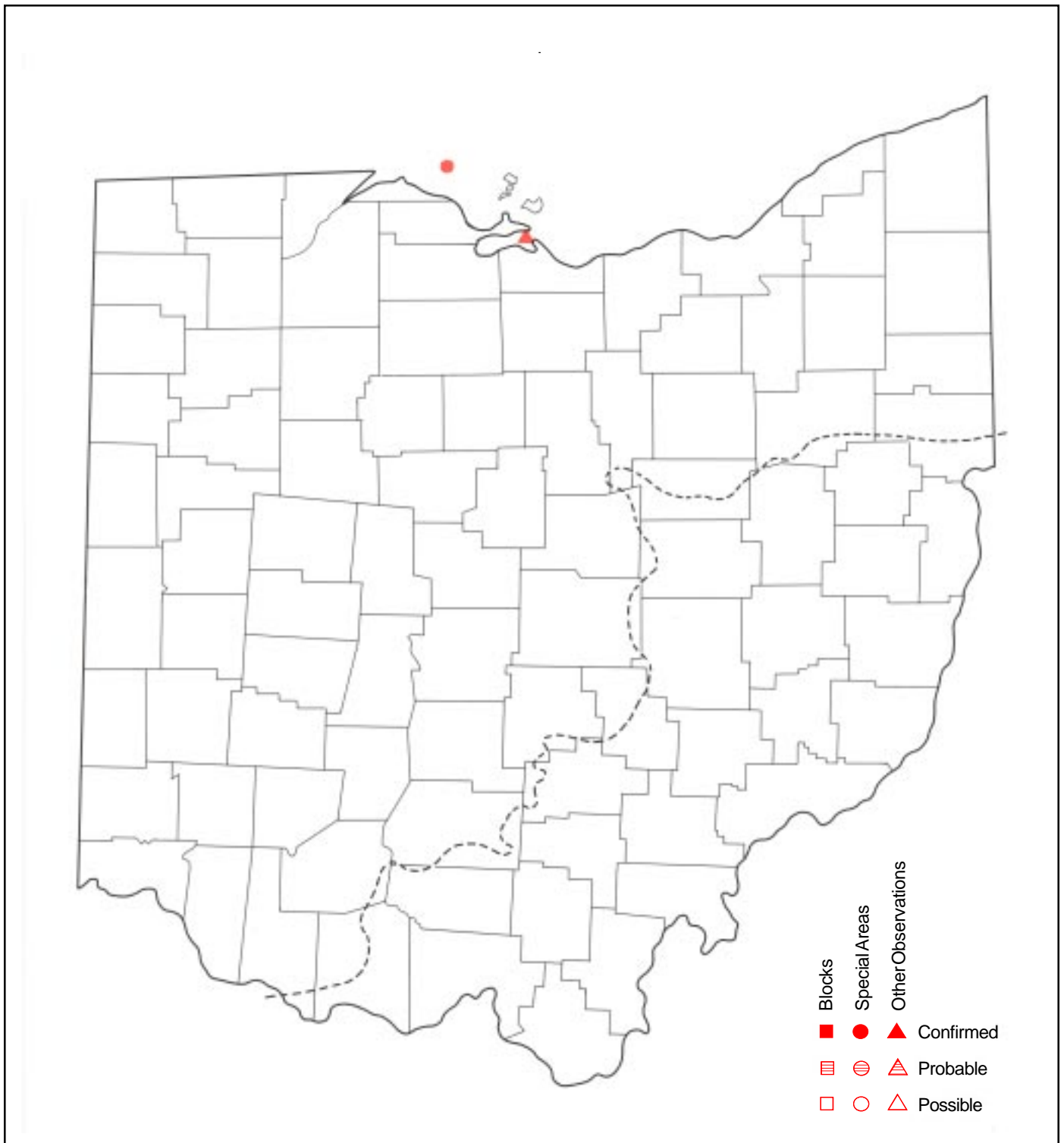
When their presence is not required at the nest, adult Cattle Egrets may be observed foraging at scattered mainland locations in Lucas, Ottawa and Erie counties. While they occasionally feed in wetlands, typical foraging sites are upland areas such as pastures with livestock, recently mowed hayfields, grassy roadside rights-of-way, and grass-covered dikes in marshes. Away from their western Lake Erie colonies, Cattle Egrets are accidental nonbreeding summer visitors, mostly detected during the first half of June and in August (Peterjohn 1989a). There were a few mid-summer records of Cattle Egrets away from western Lake Erie during the Atlas Project, but these records invariably consisted of single egrets or small flocks present for only a few days with no indication of breeding. Cattle Egrets normally occupy established heronries, especially in association with nesting Black-crowned Night-Herons. They are known to breed in small segregated colonies and occasionally as isolated

pairs. Nesting egrets may also be found near colonies of gulls and terns (Peck and James 1983). Their nests are frequently placed over or near water, in shrubs or small trees at heights of 15 feet or less. On West Sister Island, Cattle Egrets nest among the Black-crowned Night-Herons in poison ivy trees while the colony in Sandusky Bay utilizes small bushes for nest sites. Cattle Egret nests are relatively flimsy platforms constructed of sticks. Most pairs build their own nests but they have been known to usurp the nests of other small herons.



Tim Daniel - Division of Wildlife

Their breeding chronology in Ohio has been poorly documented. Nesting activities probably begin during the second half of May, shortly after the adults return to the state. Most clutches are laid during the second half of May and the first half of June. Young egrets normally hatch by late June or early July, but may not fledge until August. After their young fledge, small flocks of adult and immature Cattle Egrets can be observed foraging in scattered upland fields in the vicinity of western Lake Erie.



Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	–	–	–	–
Till Plain	271	–	–	–	–
Ill. Till Plain	46	–	–	–	–
Glaciated Plateau	140	–	–	–	–
Unglaciated Plateau	212	–	–	–	–

Summary of Breeding Status

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
Total	–	–
Confirmed	–	–
Probable	–	–
Possible	–	–