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The Probe
ISSUE 112
JULY 1991

Controlling Cattle Egret Damage in Arkansas

Michael D. Hoy, USDA/APHIS/ADC, Stuttgart, Arkansas

The North American population of cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) has increased dramatically since their original 1941 sighting in Florida. The cattle egrets' range quickly spread along the coastlines of the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of the Mexico. Dispersal inland was somewhat slower, but by 1979 cattle egrets had been found in all of the lower 48 United States. Cattle egrets were first observed in southwest Arkansas in 1962, and significant breeding populations are now present in all portions of the state.

Cattle egrets are colonial nesters and prefer dense stands of timber as breeding habitat. In Arkansas, sweet gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) and Eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) thickets are common egret rookery sites. However, several nesting colonies have also been found in pine plantations. Pines used as rookery habitat are usually killed due to a build-up of fecal material from the birds. As a result, cattle egrets can cause severe losses to merchantable timber and property values.

With suitable bottomland habitats quickly disappearing due to human development, cattle egrets are being forced away from their preferred habitats. Often they will find suitable alternative breeding habitat in or near human residential areas. Cattle egret rookeries in excess of 20,000 birds have been located within city limits in Arkansas, causing numerous health, safety, and nuisance problems. Although histoplasmosis has yet to be isolated in soil taken from a cattle egret rookery, the potential certainly exists. In addition, ticks and other ectoparasites tend to concentrate in rookery sites presenting the possibility for transmission of other diseases. Furthermore, odors from these rookeries are strong due to accumulation of fecal material and dead birds.

The effectiveness of methods presently used to manage cattle egrets is highly dependent upon timing. Traditional bird scaring techniques work well in dispersing cattle egret rookeries. However, to be effective, bird scaring programs must be initiated before nesting begins in the rookery. Cattle egrets are tenacious nest defenders and exhibit great fidelity to these sites. Pyrotechnics, distress calls, and propane exploders are useless in dispersing these birds when eggs and young are present in their nests. In Arkansas, cattle egrets arrive in late March or early April and nesting usually begins by the end of April. Therefore, cattle egret problems must be addressed quickly if bird scaring techniques are to be effective.

Some success has been achieved in expanding the effective bird scaring time frame by obtaining a depredation permit for cattle egrets through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). This permit allows the removal of early nesting birds, which are difficult to scare and act as "live decoys" to non-nesting egrets. Cattle egrets are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and it is illegal to harm these birds, their eggs or nests without a permit. Unfortunately, the approval of an application for a depredation permit has taken up to 8 weeks. Most egrets will commence nesting within 2-3 weeks after arriving at the rookery site. At this time bird scaring with or without a depredation permit is ineffective. Therefore, an applicant must be able to predict that they will have cattle egret problems if the depredation permit is to be of any use.

As is the case in controlling most rookery/nesting concentrations of birds, the best long-term solution for managing cattle egret problems involves habitat manipulation. The thinning of trees and underbrush within rookery sites, followed by a limited bird scaring program has proved to be the most effective method for dispersing cattle egrets. However, it is unlawful to remove trees and harm nests within a rookery site during the nesting season.

The cattle egret breeding season in Arkansas extends from April to September. Therefore, if individuals suffering from rookery problems do not act to solve their problem before nesting is initiated they will be forced to put up with the problem until the birds migrate from the area. Once the birds have left, habitat manipulation can legally be performed to prevent the rookery from forming next year. However, the presence of a cattle egret rookery in your backyard can make for a long and miserable summer.

Under the current USFWS interpretation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, there is no effective control method for cattle egrets after nesting is initiated. As a result, individuals with egret problems are often left without a legal course of action. Furthermore, regional policies within the USFWS regarding cattle egrets are inconsistent and make explanation of the law even more confusing. Cattle egret populations can be effectively managed, but a reevaluation of how the Migratory Bird Treaty Act protects this non-native species must be made before it is possible. The USFWS needs to recognize the economic, health, and nuisance problems created by this invading species and consider management options including population reduction as well as changes in treaties, laws and policies.

Letter to the Editors

Dear Editors:

According to an article in the *Richmond News Leader* on June 13, 1991, an ecologist at the University of Richmond and an ornithologist at the College of William and Mary conducted a study in the Richmond area to determine the depredation that their house cats were causing. The five cats studied killed 187 animals during eleven months in 1990. The animals killed included mice, chipmunks, rabbits, flying squirrels, songbirds, lizards, snakes, and frogs. One cat brought home 83 carcasses. These figures do not include animals eaten or otherwise left at the kill site.

The researchers estimated that Virginia's approximate 1 million cats kill between 3 million and 26 million birds a year. This study is not too different from the 1987 study in England that suggested 20 million birds a year were killed there by cats.

The researchers suggested that to protect other animals from cats, cat owners put bells on cats (a 20-pound cow bell would be appropriate), put bird feeders where cats can't reach them (I don't know of any yet) and keep cats inside, particularly at night. (I would rather see them kept in 100% of the time.)

Wm. Phillip Eggborn, Regional Director
Region 8 — NADCA

Bird Control Devices Available

You have a bird problem. You decide you need: (1) a Zon gun; (2) a mist net; and (3) some shell crackers. Where do you get these items? What you need is a copy of *Bird Control Devices—Sources of Supply.* This leaflet gives the name, address and in some instances, the telephone numbers of all known manufacturers of bird control materials. For a free copy contact USDA-APHIS-ADC, P.O. Box 97, Albany, New York 12201. Unlisted manufacturers may become listed by contacting the above address.

James Forbes, Regional Director, Region 7

The Probe is the newsletter of the National Animal Damage Control Association, published 10 times per year.

Editors: Robert H. Schmidt and Robert M. Timm
Editorial Assistant: Pamela J. Tinnin

Your contributions to *The Probe* are welcome. Please send news clippings, new techniques, publications, and meeting notices to *The Probe*, c/o Hopland Field Station, 4070 University Road, Hopland, CA 95449. If you prefer to FAX material, our FAX number is (707) 744-1040. The deadline for submitting material is the 15th of each month.

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

September 18-20, 1991: Livestock/Big Game Symposium, Ascaugas Nugget Hotel, Sparks, Nevada. This symposium to seek commong ground between livestock and wildlife interests on western rangeland resulted from a review of livestock/big game conflicts on national forests. A 1990 review uncovered a critical need to improve communication and understanding on the relationship between big game and lviestock that share common ranges. The symposium will provide greater in-depth analysis and discussion of the topic for ranchers, biologists, administrators, conservation groups, and livestock organizations. For more information contact Rick Forsman, Ochoco National Forest, Box 490, Prineville, Oregon 97754, (503) 447-9523. To register, write to the Livstock Big Game Symposium, c/o Nevada Cattlemen's Association, 419 Railroad Street, Elko, Nevada.

October 6-9, 1991: 5th Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conference, Ithaca, New York. Papers received after May 1 will be considered if space is available in the program. Proposed technical sessions include: Wildlife Problems in Urban/Suburban Landscapes; Wildlife Impacts to Agriculture and Forestry; Human Health and Safety Issues; Managing Wildlife from an Ecosystem Approach; Economic, Social and Political Aspects of Wildlife Damage Management; and New Pest Management Materials and Methods. Contact: Carol Rundle, Cornell Coop. Extension, Dept. of Nat. Resources, Rm. 108 Fernow Hall, Cornell Univ., Ithaca, NY 14853-3001.

February 24-28, 1992: Ninth International Bear Conference, Missoula Montana. For further information, contact L. Jack Lyon, Intermountain Research Station, P.O. Box 8089, Missoula, MT, 69807, phone (406) 329-3485.

March 2-5, 1992: 15th Vertebrate Pest Conference, Newport Beach, California. Contact: Dr. Terrell Salmon, Business Manager, c/o DANR-North Region, University of California, Davis, CA 95616-8575, (916) 757-8623; FAX (916) 757-8866.

March 27-April 1, 1992: 57th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, Radisson Plaza Hotel Charlotte and Charlotte Convention Center, Charlotte, North Carolina. Contact: L.L. Williamson, Wildlife Management Institute, 1101 14th Street NW, Suite 725, Washington, D.C. 20005.

September 13-16, 1992: International Conference on Avian Interactions with Utility Structures. Will focus on avian interactions with powerlines, towers, buildings, and aircraft. Contact: Ed Colson, Pacific Gas and Electric Company, 3400 Crow Canyon Road, San Ramon, CA 94853.

NEBRASKA ANIMAL CONTROL RESOURCES GUIDE

Assistance With Wildlife Damage Problems in Nebraska is the title of a resource guide published jointly by the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension and USDA. This "NebGuide" tells who to contact for materials, permits, and "hands-on" assistance. Contact Dr. Scott Hyngstrom, 202 Natural Resources Hall, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68583-0819.

Animal Damage Control in the News

WILDLIFE CONTROL DEBATE RAGES

The conflict between animal rights advocates and the federal Animal Damage Control program is heating up according to an an article in the June 9 *Denver Post*. Hot spot in the battle is Wyoming's Bighorn Basin, site of the precedent-setting environmental assessment of ADC's proposed use of poison on public lands. There is a belief among predominantly urban animal-rights activists that the 514 ADC trappers employed in 17 western states are "...indiscriminate hired killers" who are wasting taxpayers money. For wool and beef producers, agronomists and aquaculturists, the $33.3 million ADC budget provides a vital service.

The article states that approximately "740 people from coast to coast have expressed strong emotions about ADC plans in the Bighorn Basin." Mitch Friedman, executive director of the Greater Ecosystem Alliance, stresses that the Bighorn Basin provides an opportunity to begin a campaign to stop "...ADC or alter their programs."

But for Guy Connolly, a wildlife biologist at the federal Denver Wildlife Research Center, "The real issue is who is going to do animal damage control, and how are they going to do it." Connolly fears that eliminating ADC programs will leave private citizens "doing whatever they can, or choose to do, on their own in an undocumented and uncontrolled manner." Connolly compares predation to unemployment. "Unemployment isn't a problem unless you're unemployed. And if coyotes are killing your livestock, you have a real problem."

Black-footed ferret, *Mustela nigripes*

ACORN WOODPECKERS ATTACK IRRIGATION PIPES

Craig Coolahan, district supervisor, USDA-APHIS-ADC Sacramento, recently encountered a unique problem. He documented firsthand a complaint regarding acorn woodpecker attacks on PVC irrigation pipe in the Napa Valley of California. A viticulturist had contacted Coolahan's office reporting that woodpeckers were pecking holes in his overhead drip irrigation pipe. Upon investigation, Coolahan discovered that the reports were accurate, "Most of the holes appear to be from 4 to 6 inches from an emitter." As water supplies are abundant in the area, Coolahan speculates that the woodpeckers are pecking holes to reach whatever is making the noise, "...thinking perhaps there is an insect inside." The property owner estimates that at this date he has invested approximately $900.00 on repairs — fixing and replacing pipe.

INTEREST IN BIRD REPELLENT CHEMICALS ON THE RISE

Interest in bird repellent chemicals and commercial applications is increasing according to a recent Denver Wildlife Research Center report. During early June, DWRC's Monell scientists met with representatives from Ocean Spray, Quest International, Anheuser Busch, and PMC Specialties Group. Ocean Spray and Anheuser Busch are interested in formulations that deter nuisance waterfowl. The quest is focusing on feedlot applications. PMC, the world's largest manufacturer of methyl anthranilate, wants technical advice on applications in several contexts, but especially at airports.

SPRING BUSY FOR PREDATORS IN MONTANA

Despite the fact that most of the livestock is kept near farm buildings during the calving and lambing season in Montana, coyotes killed livestock valued at $23,610 during March. According to the April 24 ADC West Weekly Activity Report, ADC received 72 requests from sheep producers and 105 from cattle producers to help curtail the losses.

PREDATOR BORNE DISEASES ON THE RISE IN TEXAS

A coyote from Erath County, Texas tested positive for Plague. The Texas Department of Health reports this as the farthest east that Plague has been discovered in Texas. Two coyotes tested positive for Lyme's disease in Kinney County. Both Plague and Lyme's disease are expanding into new counties in the state. The incidence of rabies is also on the increase in several counties and has been reported in deer, gray fox, coyotes, and raccoon.

CONTROVERSY ARISES OVER DEER SLAYING AT GEORGIA AIRPORT

Dozens of protests came after the recent killing of six deer at Peachtree City Airport in Peachtree, Georgia. The deer were shot by three paid hunters from the U.S. Department of Agriculture after noisemakers failed to scare the deer from the 5,100-foot runway. According to an article in the March 23 *Atlanta Constitution*, the authorized hunt was prompted by "some head-on collisions and close calls." Airport authorities are hoping that the hunt will scare away other deer until the installation of a federally-funded fence around the runway. "No one feels good about doing this," Airport Coordinator Jim Savage said. "But human safety has to come first."

The editors of The Probe *thank contributors to this issue: Ron Thompson, Harry D. Pratt, Wm. Eggborn, James Forbes, Bob Phillips, and Wes Jones. Send your contributions to* The Probe, *4070 University Road, Hopland, CA 95449.*

PREVENTION AND CONTROL TIPS

This month's information is revised from Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage *(1983), published by Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service, Lincoln, Nebraska.*

Gray Foxes

RANGE

Gray foxes are found throughout the United States west to a line from central North Dakota south through central Oklahoma. They are found throughout Mexico and most of the southwestern United States to California and north from California through western Oregon.

EXCLUSION

Net wire fences with openings of 3 inches or less will exclude most foxes providing the bottom of the fence is buried with an apron of net wire. A top or roof of net wire may also be necessary to exclude all foxes since some will readily climb a fence. Properly designed and maintained electric fences can effectively exclude foxes.

FRIGHTENING

Noise-making devices such as acetylene exploders, timed tape recordings, amplifiers, or radios have been known to temporarily keep foxes away. However, the effective duration of scaring devices is short because foxes will readily adapt to such techniques.

Flashing lights, such as a rotating beacon or a strobe light, may also provide temporary protection in some circumstances. It might work in a relatively small area or in a livestock or poultry enclosure.

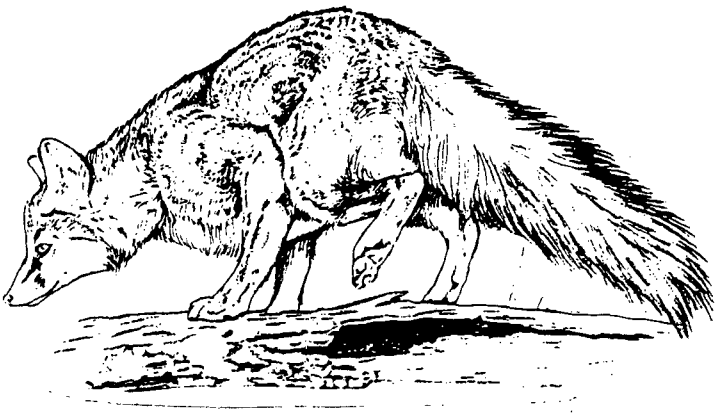
When properly trained, some breeds of dogs have been useful in preventing depradation on sheep.

TOXICANTS

Sodium cyanide in mechanical ejection devices (M-44®) is registered in some states for control of red or gray foxes by certified pesticide applicators.

FUMIGANTS

Gas cartridges made by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service are registered for fumigating fox dens. State and local regulations should be consulted before using den fumigants.



Gray fox, *Urocyon cinereoargenteus*

TRAPPING

Trapping is the best control method. Traps suitable for foxes are the No. 2 double coil spring trap, the No. 2 and No. 3 double long spring trap and the No. 2 jump trap. Traps with padded and off-set jaws decrease foot injury to foxes. The trap chain should be fastened to a trap stake (small cold-shut links are good for this purpose) and the stake driven in directly under the place where the trap is set. The chain can be folded and placed under or beside the trap.

LEGAL STATUS

Foxes in the United States generally are listed as furbearers or given some status as game animals by the various state governments. The law usually provides for the taking of foxes to protect private property. Check with your state wildlife agency for regulations before undertaking fox control measures.

Author: Norman C. Johnson, Regional Supervisor, Animal Damage Control—U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Readers are reminded that the legality of shooting and various traps differs among states and counties. Check local regulations before initiating any control measures.

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MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVE CONTEST
Strengthen NADCA and win two ways!

THE PRIZE—A handsome 12-gauge automatic shotgun, Remington Model 11-87 Special Purpose, with ventilated rib and choke tubes. New for 1991 at a Suggested Retail Price of $605! Shipped to a USA address.

CURRENT MEMBERS — The rules are simple — pass this two-sided page on to a person you believe should be a member of NADCA. If they submit a paid membership application using this page, your name will be placed in a group from which one name will be drawn for the prize. Two-page or double-sided photocopies are legal for multiple entries; the more you hand out, the more chances for you to win. The determining factor for members — check the expiration date on the mailing label on the reverse. If it isn't the current month or later, you better get out that checkbook pronto!

NEW MEMBERS — You have a chance to win a prize also; in fact, you have two chances if you sign up early! If your membership application is the one drawn for the grand prize above, you will be refunded the amount you paid for membership. Your second chance? New members signing up before the next mailing of this newsletter will then be "Current Members" as above, and will also be competing for the Grand Prize by recruiting additional members.

CLOSING DATE — The contest will close on October 8, 1991. The drawing will be at an open meeting at the 5th Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conference in Ithaca, New York.

☆ ☆

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University of California
Davis, CA 95616-8575

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NATIONAL ANIMAL DAMAGE CONTROL ASSOCIATION

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