

FIRST GREAT EGRET RECORD IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

JACQUES SIROIS, Canadian Wildlife Service, Box 637, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. X1A 2N5; GEORGE LOW, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Box 1008, Hay River, Northwest Territories. X0E 0R0; and JOHN TURQUAND MCCOLLUM, 410, 924-14th Ave. SW, Calgary, Alberta. T2R 0N7

Low and McCollum sighted a Great Egret at Hay River, Northwest Territories on 15, 16 and 17 June 1987. The bird was observed in the Hay River delta (ca. 60°51'N, 115°43'W), near the south shore of Great Slave Lake. McCollum observed the bird during at least three hours over the three days, along the shores of the Hay River and in the east and west channels of the delta.

The tall white bird, which was repeatedly seen by telescope, had 8 to 12 plumes projecting out and down from the tail, black legs and feet, yellow-to-orange mandibles with a narrow stripe of black on top of the upper mandible, a yellow iris, a black pupil and a white-to-yellow eye ring. The egret was seen capturing and swallowing a small fish after an abrupt strike into the water with its beak. The bird also flew for short distances along the river banks with its neck folded back on its body.

There was apparently a second Great Egret in the area during the same period but its presence remained unconfirmed as the two egrets were never observed together. Low photographed the bird. Photographs were sent to the Canadian Museum of Nature to confirm the identification. There was no previous record of the Great Egret in the Northwest Territories (H. Ouellet, pers. comm.).

This cosmopolitan species has been

previously sighted in all Canadian provinces but there apparently is no record for the Yukon.^{1,2,3} Dozens of sightings have been reported in the Canadian prairie provinces in the last 50 years (J.B. Gollup, unpub. data; D.M. Ealy, A.L. Smith, pers. comm.). The Great Egret was first recorded in Alberta at Cowley (49°34'N, 114°05'W), in May 1954; in August another sighting was reported at Big Lake, near St. Albert (53°38'N, 113°38'W).⁷ Apparently, this is the northernmost record for Alberta (J.B. Gollup, unpubl. data).¹⁰ The most recent observation from Alberta was recorded at Airdrie (51°18'N, 114°02'W), on 12 May 1980.⁴ The closest breeding record is from southern Saskatchewan, in 1976.^{3,5,9}

There are four records from coastal Alaska. The northernmost sighting was recorded at Cordova (60°29'N, 145°52'W) in May 1984 (B. Kessel and D.D. Gibson, unpubl. data). Accordingly, although Hay River is, in latitude, only a few kilometres north of Cordova, Alaska, this sighting of a Great Egret at Hay River is the northernmost for North America.

Although this is the first recorded observation of a Great Egret in the Northwest Territories, Cattle Egrets have been observed there on at least two occasions. One was observed at Fort Smith (60°00'N, 111°53'W) in May 1971 and another one was seen at Rankin Inlet (62°49'N, 92°05'W) in

November 1982 (C. Gates, pers. obs.).⁶ Also, a Snowy Egret was seen at Fort Simpson (61°53'N, 121° 25'W), in June 1977.⁸

Because the Great Egret has become common in southern North America and has been frequently reported in southern Canada during the last few decades, more accidental sightings can be expected in the Northwest Territories.

Acknowledgements

We thank D.D. Gibson, J.B. Gollup, E. Kuyt, K.J. McCormick and D. Mossop for their comments.

1. ANONYMOUS. 1990. Field check list — birds of the Yukon. Dept. of Ren. Res., Yukon Ter. Govt. Whitehorse.
2. AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION. 1983. Check-list of North American birds, 6th ed. 877 pp.
3. GODFREY, W.E. 1986. Les oiseaux du

Canada. édition révisée. Musée national des sciences naturelles. Ottawa. 650 pp.

4. GOLLOP, J.B. 1980. Prairie provinces region in the spring migration. *Am. Birds* 34:787.
5. HOUSTON, C.S., M.I. HOUSTON and J.B. GOLLOP. 1980. Breeding birds in Saskatchewan without documented nests. *Blue Jay* 38:87-95.
6. KUYT, E. 1971. First record of the Cattle Egret in the Northwest Territories. *Can. Field-Nat.* 86:83-84.
7. OEMING, A.F. and F.H. RIGGAL. 1955. First records of the American Egret in Alberta. *Can. Field-Nat.* 69:67-68.
8. QUINLAN, R.W. 1979. Snowy Egret in the Northwest Territories. *Can. Field-Nat.* 93:329.
9. RONEY, K. 1976. Second Saskatchewan breeding record for the Common Egret. *Blue Jay* 34:239-40.
10. SALT, W.R. AND J.R. SALT. 1976. The birds of Alberta. Hurtig Pub. Edmonton. 498 pp.

About 200 wintering Barn Swallows roosted in a room in Japan for more than thirty-five years. They entered through an open door which was closed every evening and opened each morning. After they first entered, the office was turned over to them and wires for perches were strung near the ceiling. W.J. Francis, *Bird-Banding* 39: 131 (1968).

The sunlight shifts the air currents
and brings color to skin, leaf and feather.

Day after day, season after season, the tapestry unfolds.

F. Lehrman, *The sacred landscape*. Celestial Arts, Berkeley, CA, 1988.

When you sit in a spot, your energy
becomes saturated with the tone of the place.
Imagine being a teabag that had no flavor, color, or properties
of its own, but only absorbed the qualities around it.
Let yourself sit until you are done.

F. Lehrman, *The sacred landscape*. Celestial Arts, Berkeley, CA, 1988.