# SOME ECOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE PURPLE HERON IN THE CAMARGUE

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A stay which I made from April 15th to June, 15th 1957 at the *Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat* was particularly devoted to the Purple Heron and produced the following results which, although fragmentary, may be of sufficient interest to be published. The breeding of the Purple Heron in the Camargue was first proved by Gibert in 1924, but had evidently already taken place in previous years; unfortunately we have no older precise information. During the last few years the number of breeding pairs in the area immediately to the east and the south-east of the Etang de Vacares, with which I am chiefly concerned in this paper is estimated to be nearly two hundred but precise counts are lacking. The total breeding population of the whole Camargue certainly exceeds a thousand pairs and appears to have increased during the last twenty years despite temporary declines during periods of drought.

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*The Annual Cycle of the Purple Heron.* — It is clearly recognisable that the Purple Heron is more migratory than the Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) and appears also to have a more southerly range. This difference is very noticeable in the Camargue, where the Heron is a common winter resident and where a few non-breeding birds also spend the summer; in contrast the Purple Heron is only rarely recorded from the end of October to the beginning of March. As an illustration of this the 1955 Report of the *Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat* states that the Heron was abundant in January, with a maximum of

thirty-seven on the 8th, whereas the only wintering Purple Heron was one seen and ringed in January and found dead on February 13th.

Owing to the sparsity of recoveries from Africa it is difficult to ascertain the chief wintering grounds of the Purple Heron except to say that it is almost certainly tropical Africa. The recoveries of birds ringed in the Camargue show that after the breeding season the young

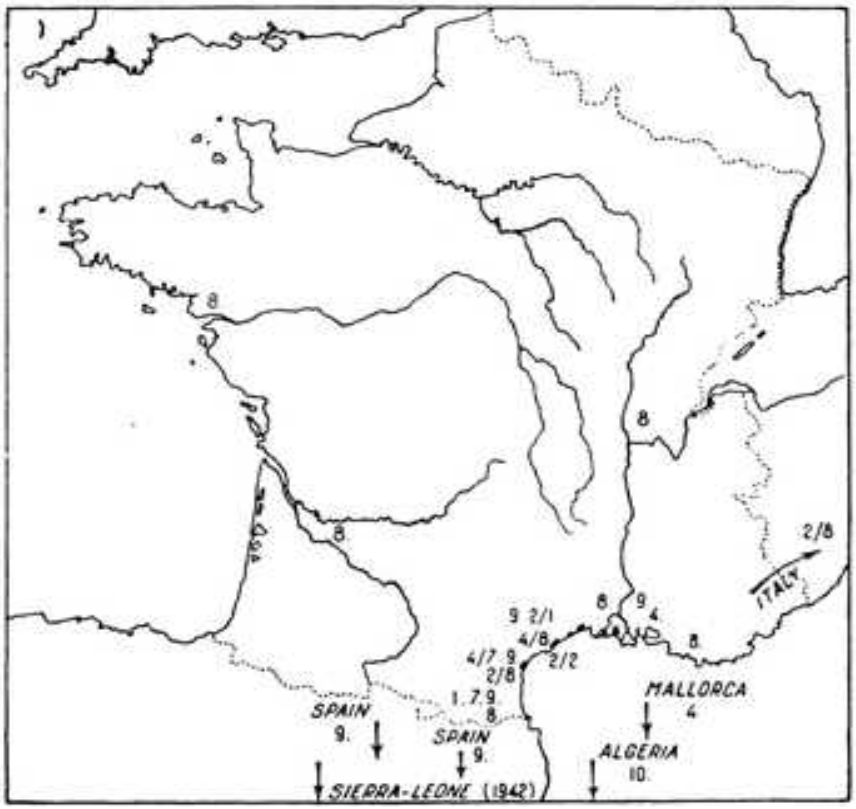



Figure 1. — Recoveries (other than recaptures in the Camargue) of Purple Herons ringed in the Camargue and two recoveries (Spain and Sierra Leone) of birds ringed in the Dombes (Ain).

disperse in all directions; for example there have been recoveries in August at approximately 175 miles north, and 225 and 400 miles north-east. Equally observed are movements along the Mediterranean coast in the direction of Spain, mainly during July and August and also a single recovery from Spain in September. Besides this migratory route another crosses Italy where birds ringed in the Camargue in May were recovered in August. There is also a single recovery in Algeria in September.

Besides southern and central France the main breeding stations of the Purple Heron in western Europe are in Switzerland and Holland. The ringing recoveries from there provide an interesting comparison with those from the Camargue. In Switzerland there is also a dispersal of the young in all directions, recoveries including three to the north and north-west from Germany in August and September. The main migratory route from

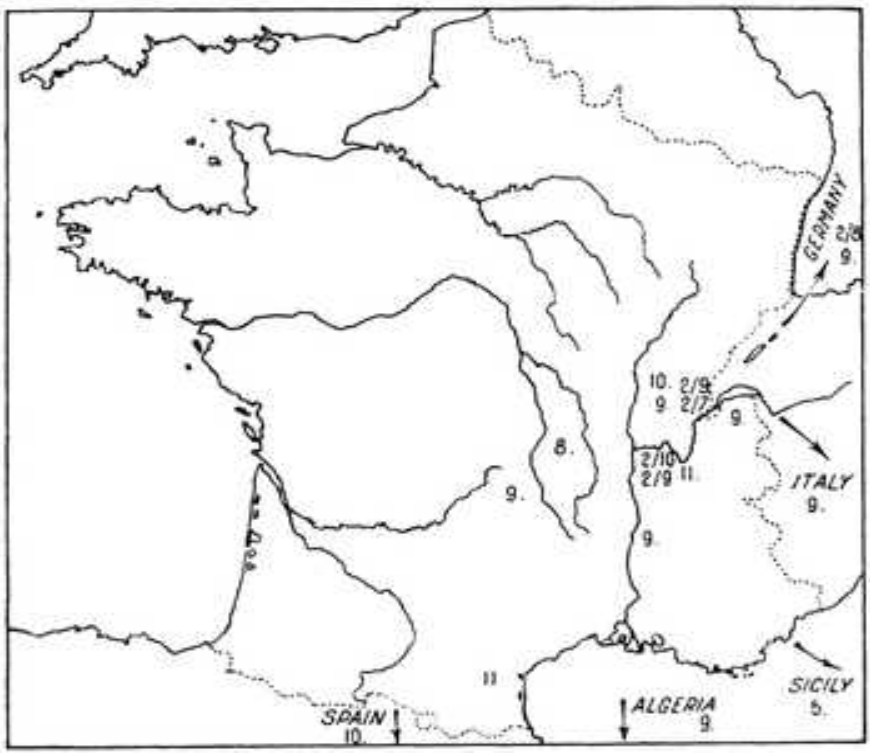



Figure 2. — Foreign recoveries of Purple Herons ringed in Switzerland.

Switzerland appears to be south along the Rhône Valley from where there are recoveries from July to October and even as late as November. As from the Camargue there is a recovery in Algeria in September. Although there have been far fewer recoveries from Holland these also seem to confirm the idea that there are very important migratory routes along the Spanish and Italian coasts. There are two recoveries from North Italy, one from South and one from North Spain.

The appended table gives the extreme dates of the arrival and departure of Purple Herons in the Camargue; the majority arrive in the middle of April and leave during the month of August. In his important paper on the Purple Heron (*Nos Oiseaux*, XXIV, 1957). F. MANUEL gives the arrival and departure dates of this species

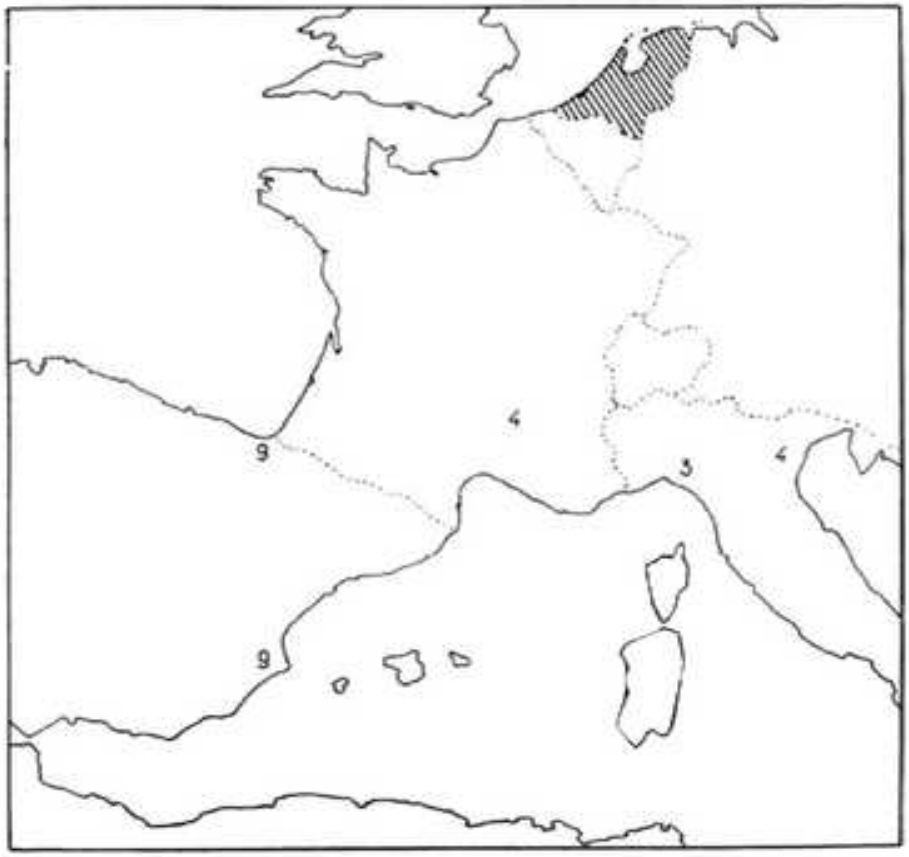



Figure 3. — Foreign recoveries of Purple Herons ringed in Holland.

TABLE I

First dates of arrival and last dates of departure of Purple Herons in the Camargue

| | First observation | Last observation |
|---|---|---|
| 1932 | | September 18th |
| 1933 | March 22nd | September 29th |
| 1934 | March 20th | |
| 1948 | April 1st | September 18th |
| 1949 | March 21st | September 25th |
| 1950 | March 24th | |
| 1951 | March 26th | October 1st |
| 1952 | March 27th | |
| 1953 | March 22nd | |
| 1954 | April 1st | |
| 1955 | April 1st | October 17th |
| 1956 | April 5th | September 8th |
| 1957 | April 5th | |

in Switzerland. These appear to be fairly similar to the figures for the Camargue although several of the dates show a much later arrival and earlier departure than in the Camargue and more recently the records have been earlier for arrival and later for departure than the counterparts in the Camargue according to the author because of more systematic observation. These last observations seem to be exactly the opposite to what should be expected especially as one of the chief migratory routes passes down the Rhône and presumably through the Camargue or the neighbouring Mediterranean coastline. Further observations may show a more accurate relation of the arrivals in both breeding places but it can already be said that they are very close together.

*Breeding data.* — The Purple Heron generally nests in quite large colonies as do the Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) and Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*) which are also common breeding species in the Camargue. All these species are very sociable in their nesting habits and the Purple Herons often neglect vast areas of apparently suitable reed-beds, preferring to construct their nests near those of others even though this entails the nest being built on the edge of the reeds in a less concealed position. In the three colonies particularly watched the number of breeding pairs was as follows: - Le Pèbre - about 30 pairs; La Capelière - between 20 and 25 pairs; Tour du Vazel/Romieu - at least 100 pairs.

Sociability appears to be the only reason for this colonial nesting as I could find no evidence of predation on the Purple Herons and hence there would be no benefit derived from mutual protection. The Marsh Harriers which frequently nested in the same marshes as the Purple Herons were never observed to interfere with the latter in any way. Nor did I find any evidence of predation by Corvids as did the Coto Donana expeditions (Mountfort, 1958).

The most favoured sites for the nests were in the less dense yet tall beds of *Phragmites communis.* All the beds composed only of old reeds appear to be systematically abandoned and the Purple Herons prefer a vegetation of young reeds. The densest reeds, which were also in many cases the oldest, were also systematically deserted, probably because of the difficulty of constructing nests there and increased difficulties of alighting on nests in such surroundings. Small « sub-colonies » of 3-4 pairs were frequently found at some small distance

from the main colony; no isolated nests being found this appears to be the minimum number of pairs for the formation of a new colony or sub-colony.

The nest is a large platform formed of many dead reeds untidily crisscrossed and piled together. The average height of the nest above water-level is between two and three feet, and of more than one hundred nests examined the extremes were one foot and more than four feet. Although generally smaller and much flatter than the nests of the Heron some of the platforms of the Purple Heron did attain quite large dimensions, the largest one examined having a width of 135 cms.

Hugues (1934) advances the theory that the nest is constructed quite naturally without any special work by the bird; he maintains that, at first, only a few twisted reeds can be seen and it is there that the Purple Heron comes to roost during the night. This forms a narrow support which, in time, becomes enlarged until it forms the platform. This theory is certainly true in as far as the first sign of the nest is the twisting together of the reeds and the bird probably does roost there, thus helping to build the platform, but I also observed many birds carrying large reeds into the reed beds ; it therefore seems that the nest is, in the first place, constructed by twisting together the reeds and then the platform is largely consolidated and enlarged on the foundation with reeds carried to the nest. It should also be mentioned that Purple Herons also nest occasionally in tamarisks; for example, in 1936, there was a colony of twelve nests in tamarisks at Salin de Badon.

The most noticeable feature of the nesting period was the disproportionate laying of eggs both in the colony as a whole and in each individual nest. First eggs were laid at the end of April. In mid-May in any of the three colonies examined there were nests being built, nests with a full clutch of eggs and nests with small young. Similarly nests were found (chiefly at the end of May and the beginning of June) in which there were either one or two eggs and newly hatched young, or perhaps, four young all graded in size from quite large to newly hatched young. This latter fact was particularly noticeable when ringing the young as in, for example, a nest containing four young probably only two of them were large enough to ring and the other two may only just have hatched. From about the age of ten or twelve days the young Purple Herons climb out of the nest when disturbed;

the flatness of the nest helps them to do this and they use both feet and bill to climb through the reeds. Even smaller young often attempt to climb out but are generally not quite strong enough to accomplish this task. The twelve-days-old young are content to climb out and conceal themselves either under the nest or very close to it whereas the older young, especially those which are fully feathered, are able to move very quickly through the reeds and travel quite a distance from the nest. It does not always follow, however, that the older young leave the nest as in one or two isolated instances quite well-feathered young made no attempt to climb into the reeds. Young Night Herons and Little Egrets also climb out of the nest when disturbed, and then use their feet and bill to move out along the branches or clamber further up into the trees in which the nests are situated.

Quite a large percentage of addled eggs were found; approximately one nest in five contained an addled egg and, in an extreme case, one nest contained one young and no less than three addled eggs. The mortality rate of young Purple Herons was also quite significant. During a total of nine visits into the three colonies (La Capelière, Le Pèbre, Tour du Vazel and Romieu) twenty-six dead young were found; most of these were small ones (the youngest having less chance of survival than their bigger brothers) but there were also some quite large ones. Particularly noticeable was the fact that only five dead young were found on eight of the visits and the remaining twenty-one were all found on the same occasion. The probable explanation of this is that on the previous day (May 28th) there had been a torrential downpour of rain and quite cold conditions. Of the forty-two nests examined at Romieu on May 29th twelve contained dead young. Starvation was not only the cause of this abnormally large percentage of deaths as, on examination, some of the stomachs of six dead young were found to be reasonably full of such insects as Molecrickets and Water-beetles. The violent weather conditions would therefore seem to be one of the main reasons for the large number of deaths, probably partly because the adults would find it more difficult to obtain food and partly because of direct physical effects on the young. It can be said that such torrential rains are uncommon in the Camargue during the breeding season. Although the Camargue Bulls wandered quite freely through the marshes at Le Pèbre, Romieu and the Tour du Vazel and frequently made large tracks through the reeds in which the colonies were

situated, no evidence of any interference with nests or young was observed.

The clutch sizes allow interesting comparison with previous figures from France and Switzerland. Unfortunately it is only possible to ascertain clutch sizes with any accuracy for those nests which contain eggs or eggs and newly hatched young, owing to the larger young leaving the nest. The following are the figures for the twenty-eight nests in which the total was accurately known:

2 eggs: 22 %
3 eggs: 33 %
4 eggs: 37 %
5 eggs: 8 %

It might also be mentioned that the figures for nests containing young did generally confirm that clutch sizes of three and four were by far the commonest and that there were also many of two. Oological data from France (Mayaud, 1932) and Switzerland (Manuel, 1957) shows that the above figures are much below the usual clutch size for the Purple Heron.

| | France (total of 96 nests) | Switzerland (Total of 154 nests) |
|---|---|---|
| 1 egg | | 2 % |
| 2 eggs | | 6 % |
| 3 eggs | 3 % | 20 % |
| 4 eggs | 18 % | 31 % |
| 5 eggs | 49 % | 35 % |
| 6 eggs | 26 % | 6 % |
| 7 eggs | 3 % | |
| 8 eggs | 1 % | |

*Feeding Habits.* — Considering that four species of gregarious Herons are reasonably common in the Camargue there is bound to be an overlapping of the habitats in which they feed. Valverde (1956) has shown that competition for food among colonial breeding Herons must be diminished or cancelled by differences in feeding times, feeding places and fishing habits. Valverde states that the Little Egret finds its food walking through fresh or brackish water, about 15 centimetres deep with little vegetation. No such generalization can be made, however,

for the Purple Heron, which feeds in a very wide variety of habitats. In the grounds of the Tour du Valat, approximately five square miles in extent and composed of cultivated land (vineyards, and fields of rice and wheat), fresh- and salt-water marshes and lakes, a small amount of woodland and a much larger extent of salt-steppe, a large number of Purple Herons feed in a diverse number of habitat-types. Although the total number varied according to the time of day and the weather conditions, estimates during May showed that between about sixty and seventy Purple Herons were feeding in the grounds of the Tour du Valat; of these, during average weather conditions, approximately eight were feeding in the marshes, pools and lakes to every three feeding along ditches.

Although never as sociable in feeding habits as, for example, are the Little Egrets (Hoffmann observed a concentration of 435 Little Egrets in August in the Camargue) Purple Herons often feed quite close together in the most favoured habitats. For example, on the west side of Saint Seren (a large lake in the grounds of the Tour du Valat) I noted five Purple and seven Common Herons feeding along a two hundred yard stretch of reeds and the next day three Purple and three Common Herons were alternately spaced out along a thirty-five yard stretch. Purple and Common Herons were frequently observed feeding in close proximity to each other but the latter was only to be seen around the edges of the largest sheets of water and, with much longer legs, generally fed much further out from the bank than the Purple Herons. On the larger stretches of water the Purple Herons generally fed either on the fringes, or in the cover of the reeds. The reeds, zoned according to the depth of water, were *Myriophillum spicatum, Potamogeton* sp. (mostly *pectinatus*), *Ranunculus baudotii* and *Scirpus maritimus* in the permanent fresh-water marshes and lakes and the latter two in the more saline marshes of the Tour du Valat. The Purple Herons were occasionally seen wading in the deep, open water but more usually they kept to the reeds; their method of feeding in such circumstances was to walk slowly, almost upright or inclined slightly forward, through the reeds. Frequently stopping, they would lean forward very cautiously so that the neck was stretched out horizontally to the body and then suddenly make a very quick lunge or stab forward; less often they would stab forward from a hunched-up position. On the occasions when they were,

apparently, successful in securing their prey they went very rapidly through the motion of swallowing several times and a white lump was distended in their neck. It was difficult to ascertain exactly what constituted their prey in these larger pools and lakes except to note that fish formed a large percentage. In Saint Seren Carps (*Cyprinus carpio*), Sunfish (*Eupomotis gibbosus*), Mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*), Rudd (*Scardinus erythrophtalmus*), Eels (*Anguilla anguilla*) and Catfish (*Ameiurus nebulosus*) were all common. Presumably Coleoptera and other aquatic insects and frogs (*Rana* sp.) are also taken in these situations. It also appeared that the Purple Herons took advantage of the large numbers of dead fish concentrated along the shore whenever a particularly strong wind such as the mistral was blowing.

In the smaller pools many of which dry up in summer (for example, Cerisière basse with a vegetation mainly of the *Juncus gerardi* and *Heleocharis palustris* association) quite a number of Purple Herons feed on the frogs (*Rana* sp.) so abundantly found there. Flooded meadows and fields also attract quite a large number of Purple Herons, principally, I suspect, to feed on the Mole-crickets (*Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa*) which are brought to the surface by the water; for example, on June 13th after a period of heavy rain I noted six Purple Herons feeding near the *Station Biologique* in small pools of rainwater. Little Egrets and Night Herons (less frequently the much rarer Squacco Heron as well) were often to be seen feeding in the ricefields but only on three separate occasions were Purple Herons noted there.

Weather conditions had a most important effect on the feeding habits of the Purple Heron. Whilst the mistral was blowing very few Purple Herons were to be seen feeding in the more exposed and open place such as Saint Seren; during this time the reeds and tamarisks surrounding the larger pools and lakes used to toss about suicidally and the water was very much disturbed. These conditions seriously hindered the Purple Herons and the few which did remain in the open places did not appear to have as much success as usual in their hunting. On such occasions more Purple Herons than usual were to be found feeding along the ditches and canals which were relatively sheltered from the wind. To illustrate this point, May 20th was a day of very strong mistral, and whereas no Purple Herons were feeding at Saint Seren there were six feeding in ditches near the *Station Biologique*. In theory, the Purple Heron is more adapted to

feeding in deep ditches and canals than the Common Heron as, with shorter legs, it can stand on the bank and more easily reach forward into the water; this theory would be exceedingly difficult to prove, however, as the ditches are generally lined with reeds, which make observation difficult, and even in the more open ditches the Purple Herons usually fly up when the observer is still quite a distance away. When feeding in a ditch with thick reed-cover the Purple Heron is not usually flushed until the observer is quite close, at which time it flies out with great suddenness, calling *frarnk, frarnk,* a call quite similar to that of the Common Heron. The ditches and canals were generally lined with *Typha* or *Phragmites* and the potential prey there was chiefly eels, carp, *Eupomotis gibbosus,* aquatic insects and especially the Mosquitofish, *Gambusia affinis,* which is abundant in such a situation. A particularly favoured ditch was the wide one bordering the Fiélouse - Salin de Badon road, where about eight Purple Herons were often seen feeding in the thick reed cover.

Purple Herons were by no means confined to fresh-water feeding grounds and were widely distributed amongst the salt-water lagoons (étangs) and saline pools. Around the Phare de la Gacholle, for example, eight were observed feeding on the salt flats and along a canal; here there was no suggestion of them feeding in cover and they were quite out in the open, as were others observed feeding in the Etang de Vaccarès and an etang to the south of Salin de Badon. Eels probably formed the largest part of their prey in salt-water and several quite large eels were seen to be taken.

*The food of nestling Purple Herons.* — The results of the analysis of the stomach contents and rejection pellets of nestling Purple Herons, shown in Table III, provide an interesting comparison with the results of Moltoni (1933 and 1934) in Italy and Owen and Philips (1956) in Holland. Moltoni found, in twelve samples, *Eupomotis gibbosus, Cyprinus carpio* and specimens from three families of aquatic insects. Owen and Philips found, in a total of seventy-three samples, that fish of more than four inches in length and Water Voles (*Arvicola amphibius*) formed a very considerable percentage of the prey. This was just the opposite to the results in the Camargue as there were a large number of aquatic insects and much smaller numbers of the larger fish such as carp and eels. As the samples in Holland were taken in late June and those in the Camargue in late May and early June this

strongly suggests that small prey is fed to young nestlings and larger prey is fed only to the eldest nestlings. As Owen and Philips have pointed out, the analysis of stomach contents gives an over-emphasis on the insect part of the diet. However, a large number of ejection pellets composed of unidentifiable insect remains were found and these confirmed that insects formed a large part of the diet of at least the younger nestlings. Several of the eels found in nests were too large to be swallowed by the young; for example an eel of more than forty centimetres in length had been rejected; the majority of eels however were between ten and thirty centimetres in length, which confirms Owen's and Philips' view that these fish were being taken selectively.

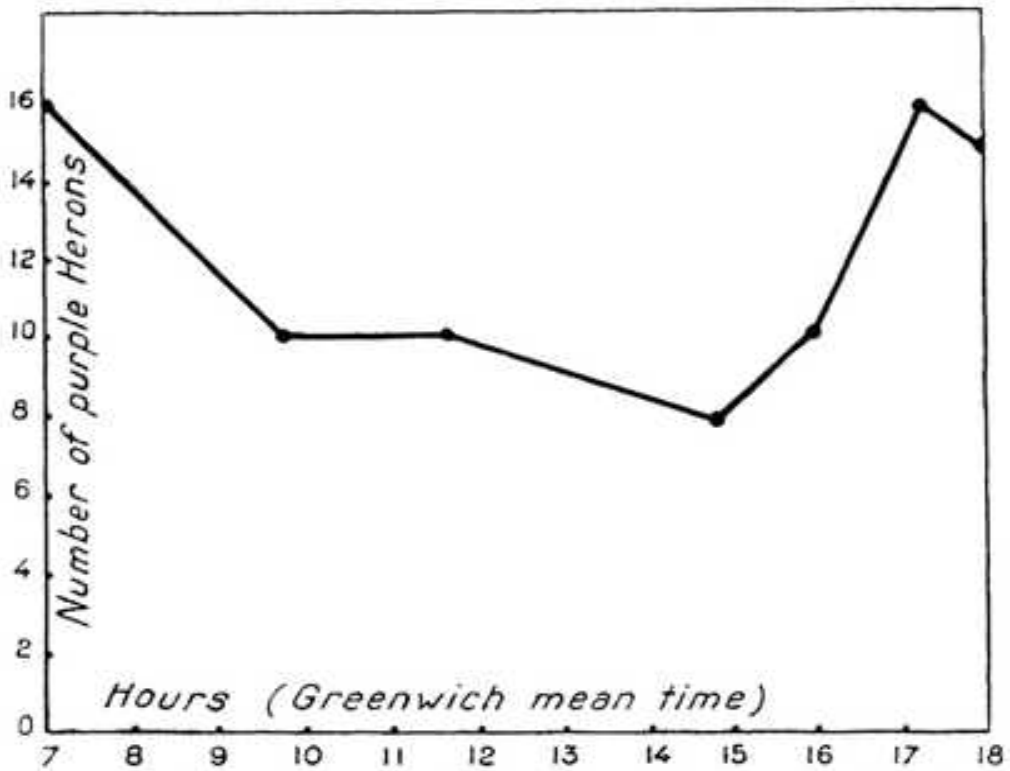



Figure 4. — The number of visits per hour of adults to nests, Le Pèbre.

Observations were made at Le Pèbre on the behaviour of Purple Herons at the colony. Le Pèbre is a long narrow marsh with a fairly dense coverage of Phragmites; the colony was situated in approximately the middle of the marshes where several tamarisks grew in close proximity. Observations were from a vantage point overlooking the colony and were each of one hour's duration. Counts were made of the number of adults visiting nests and these showed that the young were being

## THE FOOD OF NESTLING PURPLE HERONS

*Stomach contents of dead young (total 7) — May 27th and May 29th 1957*

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| HYDROUS PICEUS | 1 | | | | | | | |
| LARVAE : *CYBISTER LATERALI MARGINALIS* | 12 heads | 13 (5) heads | 1 (3) heads | | 1 Entire 13 heads (1) | | 14 heads (1) | 6 |
| *COELANBUS PARALLELOGRAMMUS* .. | | 1 | | | | | | |
| *GRYLLOTALPA GRYLLOTALPA* | | | 1 head 1 abdomen | 2 heads 1 abdomen | | | 1 head 1 abdomen | |
| *DYTISCUS* | | | | | | | 2 entire 1 foot | 4 heads fragments |
| STRATIONIDAE | | | | | | | 1 larvae | |
| Fragments of COLEOPTERA LARVAE | + | + | | | | | | |

N.-B. — Figures in brockets refer to young.

*Rejection Pellets (total 17, excluding all those which contained indeterminable fragments)*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *GRYLLOTALPA GRYLLOTALPA* | | 3 | | 3 |
| *CYBISTER LATERALI MARGINALIS* | | 31 (3) | | 16 heads |
| *ANGUILLA ANGUILLA* | 1 | 3 | 4 | 1 fragment |
| *GAMBUSIA AFFINIS* | | 14 | | |
| *RANA* SP. | | 1 | | 6 entire |
| *CYPRINUS CARPIO* | | | 1 | 1 |
| *PYRRHOCORIS APTERUS* | | | | 1 |
| NUMBER OF PELLETS | 1 | 5 | 5 | 6 |
| | 27-5-57 | 4-6-57 | 8-6-57 | |

fed throughout the day but the greatest feeding density took place in the early morning and late evening. The colony was of about thirty pairs and from the « chack-chacking » of the young it was possible to estimate that about twenty nests contained young during the period when the colony was under observation. Of a total of about two hundred birds seen either leaving or entering the colony, only five per cent were going to or from the nearest étangs or saltmarshes (the Etang de Fournelet, about three kilomètres away, the Etang de la Dame, three kilometres and the Etang de Fangassier, one and a half kilometres). Even allowing for birds which might have come from the étangs but reached the northern end of the marsh first (thus appearing to have come from the direction of fresh-water feeding grounds) the total percentage of birds from Le Pèbre feeding in salt-water habitats was small. It seems quite possible that there is considerable variation from colony to colony as birds at La Capelière were quite often observed flying across the Etang de Vaccarès in the direction of the Etang de la Dame, presumably to feed in the étangs and salt marshes around the Phare de la Gacholle. The majority of the Purple Herons at Le Pèbre were coming from and going to the direction of the Tour du Valat and Salin de Badon where it has already been shown that a large number of this species feeds, mainly in fresh-water habitats. Quite a number of birds were also observed feeding on the edge of the marshes at Le Pèbre and nearly ten per cent of the birds leaving their nests landed in the shallow eastern side of the marshes. The same thing was also observed at the Tour du Vazel where several Purple Herons were always observed feeding in the ditches and areas of shallow water around the colony.

The behaviour of birds at the colony was of particular interest. The Purple Herons generally flew in at about a height of ten feet and when almost directly above their nests they lowered their legs and holding their wings outstretched « glided » into the reeds; for the last few seconds before landing they usually kept up a very excited grunting call - *Ka-ka, kark, kark, kark* or sometimes *kark-ka-kark*, the syllables always being in very quick succession. It was noticeable that they invariably preferred to be facing the wind whilst dropping on to the nest and those that flew in down wind would carry on past their nest and turn into the wind to land. On several occasions Purple Herons experienced difficulties in landing on their nest. For example, birds were seen to glide

in, calling and with legs outstretched as if about to land in the reeds and then at the very last moment sheer off with powerful wing beats to alight at its nest usually about two or three yards away. On other occasions incoming birds perched on the reeds (no doubt their very large feet enabled them to do this) almost in the manner of a Bearded Tit (*Panurus biarmicus*) and then after waiting for a few moments flew the extra few yards on to their nests. These facts point to the difficulty which the Purple Herons have in landing on their nest and occasionally when gliding on to the nest they have to flap their wings quickly as if to maintain their balance as they land. When an observer entered the colonies the Purple Herons generally left their nests when the intruder was about five yards away; after circling round calling for a few moments a large number of them used to settle on the tamarisks, several of which grew in all of the three marshes in which observations were made. Quite a large number of Purple Herons used to perch on tamarisks not only after being disturbed from their nests but also in marshes where they used to feed and had not been disturbed. On the intruder leaving the colony the birds returned almost immediately and at Romieu and the Tour du Vazel some Purple Herons would have returned to the far side of the colony even before the observer had finally left.

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## RESUME

L'histoire du Héron pourpré en Camargue, son cycle annuel, sa reproduction, son comportement alimentaire et

son alimentation sont étudiés sur la base des observations de l'auteur en 1957 et d'après les données de la bibliographie.

Quoique nichant en Camargue depuis longtemps, le Héron pourpré semble y avoir augmenté depuis vingt ans et le nombre des couples nicheurs doit dépasser largement un millier.

Les Hérons pourprés arrivent en Camargue dès la fin mars, mais surtout en avril. Ils la quittent de juillet à septembre, la plupart en août. Les jeunes de l'année au moins s'envolent dans toutes les directions, mais rejoignent ensuite probablement l'Afrique tropicale, qui doit être le quartier d'hiver des oiseaux camarguais. L'hivernage en Camargue est exceptionnel.

L'espèce niche en petites colonies de moins de dix à plus de cent couples, généralement dans les roselières jeunes, pas trop denses. Le nid est une plateforme en tiges de roseaux d'un diamètre dépassant souvent un mètre et situé généralement de trente à cent vingts centimètres au-dessus du plan d'eau. La construction débute par le tassement des tiges sur place; des roseaux sont ensuite souvent apportés de loin pour consolider l'édifice. La ponte a lieu dès fin avril, mais elle s'échelonne sur plus d'un mois. Dès l'âge de dix à douze jours, les poussins quittent souvent le nid pour des excursions dans le voisinage. Les fortes pluies semblent être le facteur principal de mortalité parmi les poussins. Le nombre d'œufs par ponte varie selon les endroits et les saisons et semble avoir été particulièrement faible en Camargue en 1957 (Moyennes pour la France (Mayaud), 5,1; pour la Suisse (Manuel), 4,1; pour la Camargue 1957 (Williams), 3,3).

Le Héron pourpré chasse à l'affût le long des fossés ou dans la zone de bordure des marais ouverts. Poissons, grenouilles et de grands insectes aquatiques sont les proies principales. Les prairies irriguées attirent les Hérons à la recherche des courtilières, tandis que les rizières ne sont que rarement visitées. Dans les eaux saumâtres la proie principale est l'anguille.

L'analyse des estomacs et pelotes de poussins montre une prépondérance d'insectes (Coléoptères et Courtilières), moins de Poissons et peu de Grenouilles. Il est probable que des poussins plus âgés reçoivent davantage de poissons. Les poussins sont nourris pendant toute la journée, mais surtout le matin et vers le soir.

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*Travail de la Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat.*