

Herons

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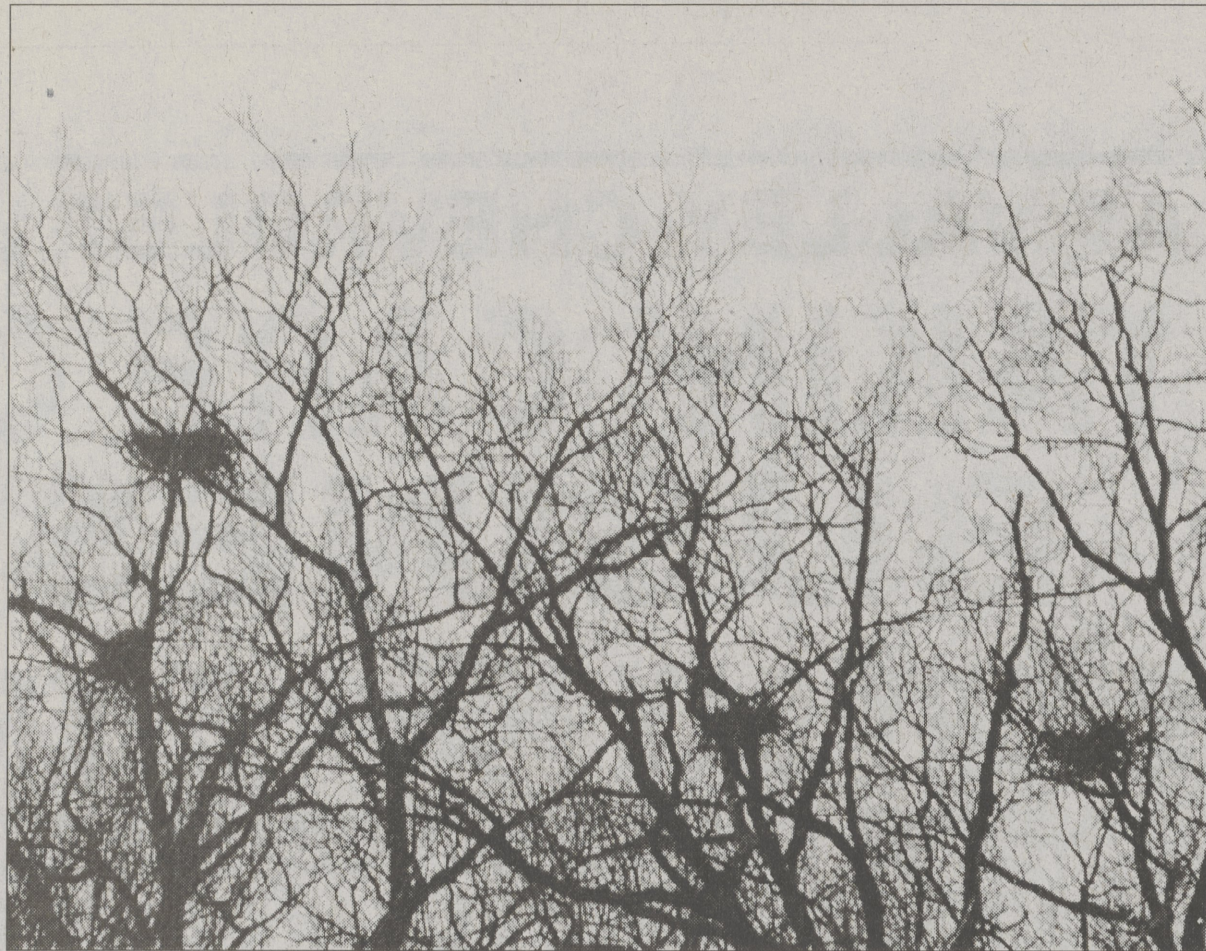
enough to know there is good food to be had at the various fish hatcheries around the state, and there they can be a real nuisance. It is legal for the managers of such facilities to use almost any possible means to prevent the birds from stealing the fish.

As is so often the case, herons had survived quite well over millions of years until people decided that it was fashionable to wear hats with large plumes. About 100 years ago, the egrets (snow-white birds closely related to herons), ibises, cranes, and various herons in North America were in danger of going extinct because of the trade in their feathers. The Audubon Society was, in fact, formed to help prevent this extinction. The small rookery at Frances Slocum State Park is evidence of their success.

Breeding season is one of the few times that great blues congregate. They mate simply to raise their young and then they go their separate ways. They may group together again for their migration trip south in the fall or occasionally in their northern feeding grounds later in the summer.

At this time of year, the adults are likely taking turns sitting on a clutch of eggs in the nest. One parent stays while the other forages for food. A heron can eat food equal to its weight in one day (these birds look large, but they only weigh six to eight pounds).

After eating, birds often groom themselves while waiting for the food to digest. The grooming serves several purposes: It removes dirt and sticks from the feathers; it adds oil to make the feathers water repellent once again, and, perhaps most important, it connects one feather to the next in a very



POST PHOTO/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

Great blue herons have built a number of nests high in trees at Frances Slocum State Park. This set is from last season, and is not being used this year.

precise way so the bird can fly efficiently.

Once the chicks hatch (about four weeks after egg laying), both parents will collect food for these new hungry mouths. For about six weeks, the hunting goes on around the clock. Being under an active rookery is not for the faint-hearted. There are strong odors and lots of noise. And, sometimes strange things will fall on one's head. But, at the end of it all, two or three young birds will be ready to fly and feed on their own. The young will join the adults (not

necessarily their parents' group) in the fall migration and will be ready to have their own young in their third year.

Great blue herons live approximately 20 years. Many migrate all the way to South America from summer feeding grounds in Canada or Alaska. They are ranked with the condor and the albatross as the best flyers among the large birds. Their six foot wings are powered by special red muscles useful in long-distance flight.

In Pennsylvania, we are indeed

lucky to share our surroundings with herons of many kinds - but, especially, the great blue. Its stately form, awkward-looking nests, and slate-blue coloring with the bright yellow eyes speak of an ancient creature that is well adapted to its environment. Even the raucous calls - the ones that John James Audubon termed "uncouth syllables" - serve to warn of danger or summon a mate. Efficiency like this is to be admired and copied, not feared or envied. Our new neighbors are welcome here.

Picnic planned at St. Frances Cabrini

A bake sale and tent picnic will be held on the church grounds at St. Frances Cabrini Church, Mount Olivet Road, on Memorial Day, May 31, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Mass will be celebrated at the church at 10 a.m. for all who have been buried at Mount Olivet Cemetery. Following the Mass, home-baked goodies and homemade foods like clam chowder, pork barbecue, wimpies, haluski, desserts and beverages will be sold. All are welcome. Takeouts will be available. The picnic is being prepared by the Parish Social Committee.

Teachers

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teachers fall to the middle of the pack when comparing their total average years of education with their peers across the state. In 1997-1998, Dallas teachers were ranked 385th out of 604 districts statewide and Lake-Lehman teachers average education total was 365th. Lake-Lehman had a

higher ranking due, in-part, to the fact that the district's salary schedule has been extended to compensate teachers who have earned a master's degree plus 54 credits, while the highest rate of pay in Dallas is granted to those teachers with a master's plus 36 credits.

How teachers rank

The following information of 1997-98 teacher rankings was provided by the Pennsylvania School Board Association. There are 604 school districts in Pennsylvania.

District	Avg. Salary	Avg. Rank	Avg. Years	Avg. Rank	Avg. Educ.*	Rank
Dallas	47,654	171	19.5	64	4.3	385
Lake-Lehman	48,014	162	18.4	154	4.3	365
Other districts						
Crestwood	50,203	110	19.0	111	4.4	211
Northwest	54,397	61	21.3	19	4.7	16
Wyoming Area	49,295	129	21.3	19	4.8	1

* Numerical value based on degrees earned and other education completed. Highest ranked districts are 4.8, the lowest are 3.2

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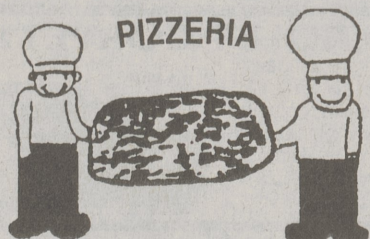
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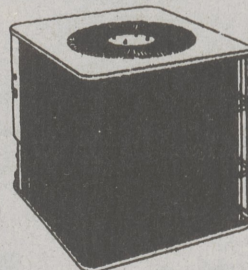
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Stalking

(continued from page 1)

Well, my life and certainly my photography has been serendipitous. This spring my son's Back Mountain Baseball team, the Tigers, practiced for two hours every Monday night at — you guessed it — Francis Slocum State Park. And the winter's winds had not destroyed those nests. I forged into the fields with a longer lens.

When I got those nests in focus I saw something big and black hovering above each nest. Crows I thought. Wrong again. Could it be, yes, it certainly was a group of immature blue herons standing on their former homes waiting for a parental handout I'm sure. Now every photographer knows the axiom that closer is better, that no matter how close you are it's never too close or close enough. So I trudged and hacked my way through the underbrush to get a closer shot. But a very peculiar thing happened; the nearer I got to the trees, the less I could see the nests. And then I couldn't see them at all.

At that point, I had crawled through enough underbrush. I backtracked until I could see the nests again and make some mental field references. The blue heron tree nests were so many feet from this tree in reference to that tree etc. Armed with information, I tramped into the brush again. I couldn't see them, but bushwhacked through to a stream which I forded. The birds didn't fly, which I half expected knowing a little about herons. I made like a deer, five or six feet and I would stop, then start again. Soon, I had the trees in my sights again, and could see the birds. My heart thumping as I crept closer, ever closer, I was 30 to 50 feet from the base of the rookery trees and continued to creep closer and started shooting film. I imagined they didn't

hear me. The wind came from the west or they were young and very much at home. Maybe they knew the four-foot-high field-stone wall would stop me in my tracks. It did. I wanted to be right under the trees shooting up but needed to climb the stone wall.

Up over the wall and 10 feet in the terrain turned to impassable brush and evergreens to the base of the trees. The blue herons took flight, probably to their other rookery further in, and I realized I'd been shooting into the setting sun anyway which gave me some groovy silhouettes of blue herons. I just needed to be on the other side of the trees.

All mothers come to realize how much can be accomplished when their children are sleeping, playing, or otherwise engaged. When I came out of the woods, Carl's baseball practice still had another 40 minutes. I jammed the "Mom" van in reverse and headed for a farmer's field a mile down the road and on the other side of the rookery trees. Field references all set, I confidently strolled in through the brush, and guess what, another stream to ford. But the killer was — did you guess it — another four-foot stone wall 30 to 50 feet from the rookery trees on the other side! I gave up. These darn birds had situated themselves on the tops of 50 to 70 foot trees surrounded at the base by thick all-season underbrush. To top that, there was a stone wall running on either side of the trees and a stream on each side to ford too. Now, you tell me if this is just coincidence or are these birds pretty crafty. The sun was setting, baseball practice was almost over, and I have groovy silhouette pictures of these crazy herons as testament to nature's supremacy over woman.

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