

# General Field Notes

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## Bill-vibrating Feeding Behavior in the Snowy Egret

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About 0700 on 18 August 1981 I noticed unusual feeding behavior in a Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) at North Pond in the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, Dare County, N.C. The bird was standing in water that reached the feathered portion of the legs. Its body and lower neck were held parallel to the surface of the water and just barely above it. The upper neck arched to permit immersion of the tip of the bill in the water. The bird opened and closed the bill almost imperceptibly at a very rapid rate. This caused visible turbulence in the water at the point of immersion. Occasionally the heron assumed an upright posture and took a few steps before crouching and again vibrating the bill in the water. Twice the bird moved forward very slowly without removing the bill from the water or ceasing the vibrations. The behavior continued for about 15 minutes after I first noticed the bird. The egret then left the water and stood on a nearby island. Although the Snowy Egret is generally a very active bird while feeding, this one appeared to be using the bill vibrations as a variation on the crouched stand-and-wait technique regularly employed by the Green Heron (*Butorides striatus*).

Kushlan (Auk 93:86-94) summarizes 28 feeding behaviors recorded for one or more of the North American herons. He lists three species reported as having used bill-vibrating to create a disturbance that attracts prey: Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), and Snowy Egret. James F. Parnell (pers. comm.) says that he has seen bill vibrations employed on several occasions by Black-crowned Night-Herons feeding in floating mats of algae. Perhaps the technique is not as uncommon as the few published reports suggest.

## A Bird List for Caldwell County, N.C., in Late May

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On 30 May 1981 I spent several hours watching birds near Hudson, Whitnel, and Lenoir in south-central Caldwell County, N.C. Elevations here range from 950 feet (Hudson) to 1182 feet (Lenoir), and the habitat is primarily rolling hills forested by Pitch Pine (*Pinus rigada*).

Forty avian species were recorded, and of these the 30 that showed territorial behavior are followed by an asterisk (\*): Sharp-shinned Hawk 1, Cooper's Hawk 2\*,