

Allen, "is the Buff-backed Heron in its winter plumage of pure white, which is to be met with in flocks of from four or five to thirty, distributed all over the country. These birds especially affect the society of cattle, and may be seen feeding among the legs of the cows and buffaloes in the most fearless manner, like Starlings in a flock of sheep, frequently perching on the backs of the lazy animals in the same way. The Arab name 'Abou Gerdán' (father of flocks), the French 'le Heron Garde-bœuf,' and the Latin appellation '*Bubulcus*,' all have reference to this marked peculiarity.

"Contrary to the usual custom of the Herons and Egrets, most of which are piscivorous, the 'Buff-backed' does not feed upon fish, but upon the various kinds of insects, particularly grasshoppers, which are so abundant in the rank herbage produced by the peculiar system of irrigation which obtains amongst the Arabs. They are consequently seldom seen near the water's edge. About dusk they retire to the trees to roost; and though I have occasionally seen them in the Date-palms, they generally choose the Sycamore, or wild Fig-tree, for that purpose.

"It is frequently asserted that the Arabs consider this bird *sacred*, and that killing one is looked upon as a serious offence; but I believe this is not the case, at least, not in a *religious* sense. I have sometimes been reproached for shooting a specimen, much in the same way that we should speak to any one who killed a robin; and I think that this more correctly represents the feeling on the point, although it is a hopeless task to try to make an Arab understand any thing of an abstract nature.

"During the winter the plumage of the Buff-backed Heron is of a creamy-white colour, with a small reddish-buff patch on the top of the head; the legs and feet black. About the commencement of April longer feathers of a pale buff begin to appear on the back, neck, and crest; these continue to grow in length and deepen in colour until the end of May, by which time the summer dress is complete. At the same time the legs and feet change to a pale yellowish olive. The bill at all times is of an ochraceous yellow; but the irides vary in different specimens (probably according to age) from pale to bright yellow; the lores are greenish. The male is generally rather larger than the female, and has the long feathers a little more developed.

"We did not meet with the nests of the Buff-backed Heron; and it seems probable that they are late breeders, as, in those killed about the end of April, the ovaries did not appear enlarged."—*Ibis*, 1863, p. 32.

"Though local," says Mr. Salvin, "the Buff-backed Heron occurs abundantly where it is found in the Eastern Atlas. I first met with it near Bizerta, and afterwards at Zana, where it was numerous, a large flock frequenting the marsh. We did not obtain any of their eggs; and, to all appearance, the birds had not entered upon their domestic duties when we left their haunts."—*Ibis*, 1859, p. 358.

Dr. Leith Adams tells us that "in Egypt and Nubia the bird feeds chiefly on frogs, of which it devours large numbers. The call resembles the 'bleat' of sheep."—*Ibis*, 1864, p. 31.

The Rev. H. B. Tristram states that the bird is very common throughout the year about all the oases of North Africa. Mr. C. F. Tyrwhit Drake that it is equally numerous in Tangier and Eastern Morocco.

"The only known breeding-places of the Buff-backed Heron in Northern Africa," says the Rev. H. B. Tristram, "are Lake Halloula and a lake between Bona and Tunis. Here the Buff-backed, Squacco, and Night Herons, and the Glossy Ibis all breed in communities—at Lake Halloula this year probably for the last time, as the French Government has begun to drain this paradise of Herons, employing vast numbers of soldiers, and in the middle of June last the waters were already reduced by seven feet. It is remarkable that though there are trees and rising ground on the north of the lake, yet none of these birds frequent that side, the favourite haunts of the various *Salicariæ*, but all remain on the south side, sheltered in a pestilential morass by a jungle of reeds, and all deposit their eggs on nests heaped on the ground. The Buff-backed Heron builds a little further back from the water in general than the Squacco, but neither of them elevates its nest more than two feet from the swamp."

In some notes on the birds of the Colony of Natal, forwarded to Mr. J. H. Gurney by Mr. Thomas Ayres, that gentleman states:—"The flats near the mouth of the river Umlaas are the only localities where I have seen this species. They are gregarious in their habits, roosting by night amongst the branches of the trees which overhang the small lakes that are plentiful in that part of the country. They appear to feed entirely on ticks (*Acari*), which they pick from the cattle as they are feeding, walking alongside of them, and every now and then taking one off. They are wary birds, and not easy of approach." Mr. Ayres also states that "it is very abundant in the Transvaal."—*Ibis*, 1863, p. 330, &c.

The sexes undergo the same changes, and are therefore alike at all times.

The foremost figure in the Plate, which is about the natural size, represents the bird in its full summer garb; the reduced figures represent two others in the same state, and one in winter plumage.