

Nocturnal foraging of Yellow-crowned Night Herons in the Bahamas.—Detailed observations of nocturnal foraging of the Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax violaceus*) are not to be found in the literature, though this species commonly feeds at night (Kushlan 1978, Riegner 1982a). I observed several Yellow-crowned Night Herons foraging during November and December, 1978 on San Salvador (Watlings) Island, The Bahamas. I watched herons from two palm-thatch blinds, a burlap blind, and a rooftop, all of which bordered an expansive lawn in front of the San Salvador Coast Guard Station. Because the lawn received dim light from nearby buildings, I was able to watch foraging herons with reasonable clarity, though not well enough to identify most prey items. I do not know whether the artificial lighting helped herons to locate prey, but this seems likely.

The Yellow-crowned Night Herons I observed typically adopted both "upright" and "erect" postures while employing "standing" foraging behavior (terminology that of Kushlan 1976, 1978). All foraging appeared to be visual; I often noted the neck posture "head tilting" as herons scanned the ground for prey. Herons exerted "bill thrusts" and used "pecking" followed by "grasping" of very small prey items, probably insects, which were quickly swallowed. As did Riegner (1983), I observed herons widely foraging using the "walking slowly" behavior. "Upright" and "crouched" postures were employed equally often during walking. Unlike previous workers, I observed intermittent "running" on four occasions while herons were widely foraging. Because running never resulted in the actual capture of prey, I am uncertain as to whether it was a true component of the foraging repertoire. Most previous studies of Yellow-crowned Night Heron foraging behavior have been of birds wading in water. Running may be more common among terrestrially-feeding birds and should be watched for in the future.

By day, Yellow-crowned Night Herons on San Salvador, as elsewhere (Riegner 1982b), feed largely on crabs, according to the island residents I interviewed. In the winter, however, crabs become relatively scarce on San Salvador and insects appear to be the major component of the diet. On one occasion I observed the capture of a lizard, approximately 10 cm in length, by a heron foraging beneath a lighted streetlamp. After seeing the lizard, the heron remained motionless except for occasional quick jerks of the head and neck in the direction of the prey. The summation of jerks over nearly one minute resulted in a ratchet-like inching forward of the head to within 30 cm of the lizard. After pausing several more seconds, the bird thrust downward at about a 45° angle, immediately pulling back with the lizard in its bill; the lizard was soon swallowed head first.

In summary, my observations support Riegner's (1983) assertion that "the Yellow-crown's flexibility in foraging behavior provides a partial explanation for the occurrence of this heron in diverse habitats. . . ." Nocturnal observations of Yellow-crowned Night Herons and other species would be easier with the aid of a night vision device or light-emitting tags attached to birds under study (Batchelor and McMillan 1980, Clayton et al. 1978, Lehner 1979).

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