

*Great Egret in breeding plumage. Photos taken at Crabtree Nature Center, Cook Co. by Ken Oberlander.*

colonies. In 1993, there were about 9,400 active Great Blue Heron nests and about 1,625 active Great Egret nests. There were also two substantial colonies each of Little Blue Herons and Cattle Egrets each with about 500 nests. There were some 900 counted Black-crowned Night-heron nests with two substantial groups not counted.

The censuses are done both from the air and from the ground in an



effort to maximize the quality of the count. Whatever the method, there are inherent difficulties in censusing these birds. Only Great Egrets and Great Blue Herons nest in the open so that it is relatively easy to survey the birds from the air. It is difficult to count other species such as Little Blue Heron and Black-crowned Night-Herons because they nest below the tree canopy. And for similar reasons it is difficult to count Cattle Egrets, although their striking white at least allows for a better estimate than their darker brethren. The problems with aerial counts can be serious. Indeed, some aerial counts have produced 50 percent less birds than what was counted from the ground at the same site.

It should be noted that it is difficult to get accurate counts for any given year and it is even more difficult to be certain about the comparability of counts between years. Herons abandon areas they have used and move to other places. Their new colony may not be discovered. Other areas may be transitional due to less than ideal nesting conditions.

Recent data suggest an increase in the numbers of some of the herons and egrets that are on the state-endangered species list. One must be cautious, however, because multiple potential assaults on their numbers continue to exist. With so much of Illinois' wetlands gone, the status of these birds may always be tenuous.

#### **Literature Cited**

Grabner, Jean, Richard Grabner and Ethelyn L. Kirk. 1978. Illinois Birds: Ciconiiformes, Illinois Natural History Survey, Biological Notes No. 109.

Kleen, Vernon. 1983, 1984 and 1985, 1987, 1993. Illinois Heron Colony Survey Reports.

