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NOTES OF THE FOOD OF THE BLACK CROWNED NIGHT HERON IN
CAPTIVITY.

BY B. H. BAILEY.

While studying the bird life of Eagle Lake in Hancock county, Iowa, we captured and brought alive to Cedar Rapids an adult Black Crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax Nycticorax Naevius*.) It was kept at Bever Park for observation, and on account of the scarcity of frogs and fish, various kinds of food were presented to it, among which were some white rats that, being prolific, were used by the keeper as food for the caged hawks and owls. The Heron seemed to take unhesitatingly to these, and would kill and eat a rat with apparent relish. When a two-thirds grown white rat was placed in the cage the bird would seize it immediately by the back of the neck. By beating and biting, the head, and probably the ribs also, were crushed. It was then carried in the Heron's bill to the water pan, where the rat was immersed several times and then swallowed, head first, and entire. Not less than three hours after this performance a symmetrical ball of fur, so compactly felted together that it was with difficulty pulled apart, would be regurgitated. Unlike "owl pellets" in only one instance did I find any bones or even teeth in this hair ball. On this occasion half of the lower jaw with a lower incisor, was found firmly imbedded in the mass. The excrement, as is common in this order of birds, was very limy, resembling whitewash. The character of the excrement is easily explained by the amount of bone these birds ingest, and it is remarkable that teeth are likewise disintegrated. No hard bodies, such as bone, could be found in the cage, either in the excrement, or in the regurgitated mass, with this single exception, which was due, no doubt, to the matting of the hair about this bone and tooth before the digestive juices could act upon it.

The readiness with which these mammals were eaten suggests that the Black Crowned Night Heron may be a factor of some moment in destroying noxious rodents, especially at night, which is their usual feeding time.