

Nesting birds plentiful here

There is likely no more pleasurable, and certainly no more innocent, outdoor activity that bird-watching, whether it be at your backyard feeder in the depth of winter or at a hummingbird station in the bloom of summer, and those who enjoy it most know that generally you get what you work for.

Build cover on your suburban land, install feeders or bathers in your urban backyard. Stock up on food; be generous in your offerings. Usually this is the ticket.

But locally we are blessed with the opportunity of seeing a broad variety of bird life without taking any more pains than to reasonably leave them alone.

Long before white blooms ever show up on our magnolias, white blooms appear in the oaks and yaupon of Battery Island across from Southport. Beginning by mid-March every year, the first of nesting

American egrets begin their home-making in the Battery Island trees, and from then on it just gets better and better.

Soon huge flights of ibises, as white as the egrets and far more numerous, start making their way to the island's downriver end, sweeping the ground virtually bare of twigs while they build their own nests. And at the same time other

waders begin moving into the rookery -- night herons, tricolor and little blue herons and cattle egrets, and suddenly the parade is on.

This is the show we don't have to pay for -- the morning and evening processions of adult birds sweeping across the river to feed in near-shore marshes, at sea and even as far inland as the Green Swamp.

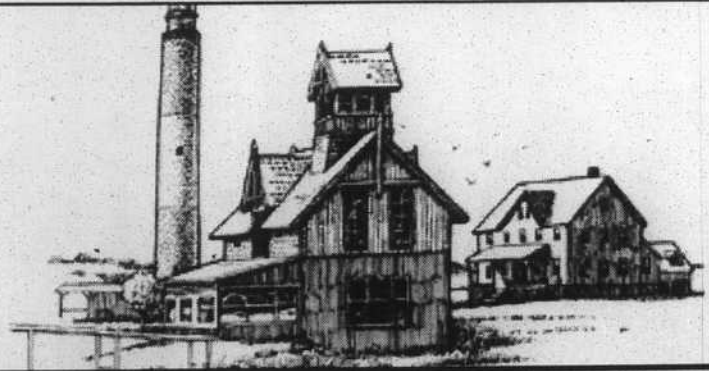
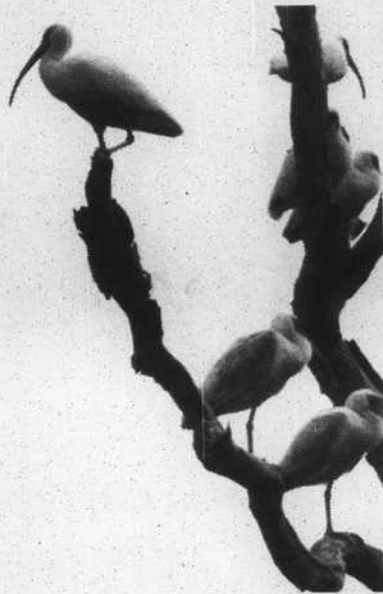
Likewise shorebirds, perhaps not as showy but just as interesting -- the scurrybirds of the ocean beaches and oystercatchers of inshore waters -- will be on hand and we can watch them feeding and in the oystercatcher's case watch them protecting their marshside nests.

Pelicans, gulls, terns -- all will be using their upriver rookeries and later teaching their young to fly and to feed.

A word to everyone who likes birds, though: They need their privacy in their nesting sites as well as while feeding. Chase a bird out

of his feeding habitat in the marsh and he'll develop new feeding habits that you can't watch. Disturb a nestling or an incubating parent on the nest, and you put the youngster in jeopardy either from predators or the elements. Leave the nests, and even the whole colonies, alone.

That's all it takes, and here they'll come again. Things are looking up.



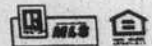
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