

PARADISE OF THE EGRET

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白鹭图

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走近鹭鸟

“鹭栖人宜生，鹭盛业亦兴”。

鹭，在动物学上属鸛形目，鹭科，为涉禽。鹭科全世界有17属61种，我国有10属21种，除少数是不迁徙的留鸟外，多为候鸟，分布于全国各地。比较常见并被摄影家们喜爱聚集拍摄的鹭鸟主要有：大白鹭、白鹭、中白鹭、牛背鹭、苍鹭、池鹭等。它们习性不同，形态各异，或雍容优雅、娟秀婀娜，或色彩亮丽、活泼洒脱，被国际环保界赞誉为“大气和水质状况的监测鸟”，因此历来为文人墨客吟咏讴歌、挥毫泼墨、举镜摄影而痴迷忘返。

鹭鸟喜欢栖息在幽深宁静的环境中，近人性，富人情味。它们随气候变化而迁徙。每年“白露”节前后结群南飞度冬，经半年远游，于翌年春暖花开“清明”前北返故林。凭着鹭鸟的智慧，它们还能找到旧时的巢居，而后即会衔枝叼草加固装修旧巢。如发现旧巢破损，或不复存在，鹭鸟则飞上飞下欲探明究竟，一般还会在原树原枝杈的旧巢处重新营巢。一旦开始营巢，雄雌鹭鸟则齐心协力，多数时间是雌鸟留在巢边，雄鸟外出觅找巢材，运回交雌鸟筑巢，配合默契，尽心尽职。新巢建成，它们共同沿巢检查验收，不时修修补补，扇翅亮羽，连声鸣叫，向四邻宣告新居和领地范围。此时，雌雄鹭鸟在自己的巢区领域内最为活跃，生态情趣流露也最多。巢区是鹭鸟在繁殖期间围绕巢址所占的一定区域，作为觅食活动和营巢的场所，这块领域不允许其它鸟类，特别是同种鸟类侵入。雄鸟往往站在高处观望守卫，一见入侵者就立即冲下去

驱赶。有时雌鸟也挺身跃出参加战斗，一副“卧榻之旁岂容他人酣睡”的架势，入侵者往往退避三舍，知难而去。有时遇上不甘心的失败者，悄悄地待雄鸟外出觅食时，趁雌鸟不注意，飞来偷几枝巢材。如雌鸟争夺不过，雄鸟回巢见状往往即行报复，于是一场捍卫家园、争夺巢材的战斗又开始了。强者为胜，败者往往黯然退走，另觅新领地。当然也有的经过打斗难分胜负，相互妥协而结为睦邻，长期和平共处。鹭鸟筑巢、修巢、捍卫领地的生态情趣，表现在整个栖息期间的半年里，3月初至4月末有趣的“故事”最多。它们在营巢的一个月前已结成对，4月、5月则雌雄进入求偶繁殖的高潮，此时，各种雌雄鹭鸟都毛色油亮、饰羽发达。尤以白鹭头后两条柔软细长的矛状羽迎风飘动，分外妖娆动人。大白鹭、中白鹭虽没有矛状顶羽，但胸羽、背羽特别发达。求偶时雌鸟常常支起饰羽鸣叫，并接连作下蹲状，雄鸟更是张开双翅，竖起饰羽，围绕雌鸟频频转圈，展示自己的雄健和俊丽。有的雄鸟还常衔回泥鳅、小鱼、蚯蚓，献在雌鸟身边，观其美餐，然后再双双跳起求偶“华尔兹”。白鹭每窝产卵3~6枚，常间隔24~48小时产一枚卵，卵的形态为椭圆形或橄榄形，大小如鸽卵一般，约45毫米左右，呈灰绿色。白鹭由雌雄亲鸟轮流孵卵，在轮班时当面清点卵数，并稍作翻动。一般雌鹭孵卵时间长，雄鸟担任觅食和警卫任务。遇有风雨，还能见到双鹭蹲巢

或张翅为另一只孵卵亲鸟遮雨的动人情景。孵化期约25天，其间的情爱悲欢，如歌似诗。白鹭组成家庭后，坚持一夫一妻制，一旦丧偶，留下一方还会继续孵卵和育雏，时间长了，有的也会不时演出“寻找新欢”、“第三者插足”的悲喜剧。

白鹭由雌雄亲鸟共同承担育雏任务。幼雏在巢中鸣声不断，观察时最易顺声寻巢，就近隐蔽等候亲鸟飞返喂雏。有时是一只白鹭喂食，另一只在巢边维持秩序或防卫其它的鸟窠来抢食。喂食时鸣声一片，幼雏张嘴展翅左右摇摆，亲鸟张羽含食逐一将嘴伸进幼鹭口中度食。有时饥饿的幼雏竟将喂食的亲鸟嘴和头颈紧紧咬住不放，情趣盎然。白鹭演绎的“故事”，突发的“情节”，有相当多是在巢边发生的，而且经常重复出现。比如白鹭极为优美地梳理翅羽和饰羽的姿态，每天都在巢边或附近树顶重复多次，有时达十余次。如恰好逆光透过鹭鸟翅羽，常可见到宛如“精灵披纱”、“芭蕾亮相”般晶莹剔透、似画如诗、令人叹为观止的场景。

一待幼鹭羽翼渐丰，亲鸟就逐渐减少喂食，引其追跟，教其学飞，由近及远。日间领飞于田野荷塘觅食，傍晚又率幼鹭飞返林巢。如不遇干扰，每日往返路线基本不变。10月，暑尽秋凉，迟至月中旬，白鹭结群南迁，悲凉不安的气氛荡漾林间，此时鹭鸟多是集体结群活动，几家、几群紧紧相随，群飞群降，积极准备翱翔远行。有些出壳较晚、未得充分饲喂而体弱或伤病幼鹭，无力随群长途跋涉，只能滞留当地苟

延残喘，最终任秋霜冬寒摧残夭折。1998年笔者在白鹭觅食的水塘边拍摄到一组因病弱而滞留的白鹭挣扎恋生的情景：一阵寒冷的秋雨秋风将两只幼鹭逼倒池中，在挣扎的过程中一只幼鹭尽力靠近另一只病鹭，艰难地为其张翅遮雨挡风。随着寒冷雨夜降临，眼见两只弱鹭先后不支溺水而亡，不禁令人感叹“物竞天择”、“优胜劣汰”自然规律的冷酷无情。

表现鹭鸟的艺术作品应充盈情趣，才能具有艺术魅力。在创作时应注意：一要捕捉其真实自然的生态美；二须力争以新角度、新发现、新技法、新效果表现新颖之美，力避科普挂图般的呆板、冷漠；三宜努力表现生命活力，借鸟拟人，寓景抒情，创造出能引发观赏者情感共鸣的美；四是避免平铺直叙，尽力营造婉约含蓄的蕴藉美。中外许多表现鹭鸟的艺术佳作正是以情趣的真实、新颖、动情和蕴藉让人赏心悦目。美国著名白鹭摄影家洛森·戴维说：“拍摄鹭鸟犹如体育摄影家拍摄一场足球赛，使用器材基本相似，对基本功要求亦相同，都是要拍出趣味和显示出情感倾向，都要有较强的专业敬业精神。所不同的是，拍摄白鹭还要想方设法身近其境隐蔽自己，那就更加艰难和辛苦。”这是其他艺术创作门类所少见的，当然也正是摄影野生动物所独具的魅力。

宫 正
1999年8月

A CLOSER WATCH ON EGRETS

“If In Perfect Harmony With The Egret, We Would Benefit A Lot From Them. ”

The egret, part of Ardeidae of Ciconiiformes in zoology, is a kind of wading bird with 17 genera and 61 species in the whole world. China has 10 genera and 21 species, most of which are migrant birds distributed all over the country besides a few resident birds. Those common egrets such as: Large Egret, Little Egret, Intermediate Egret, Cattle Egret, Grey Heron and Chinese Pond Heron are photographers' favorite subjects because of their various characteristics and shapes: elegant and graceful, vigorous and colorful. Highly commended as “ Monitoring Bird of Air & Water Quality” by the international environment protection circles, the egret has always been praised by numerous poets, artists and photographers with their fine works.

With the same characteristics as human beings, the egret likes to perch in the tranquil and secluded environment, and migrates with change of weather. Every winter the egret flies in-groups to the south for half a year, then fly back to the habitat next spring. Being smart bird, the egret can easily find its old nestle and reinforce it with tree branches and grass. If the nestle disappears or is heavily damaged, the egret would check around the site and usually rebuilt the nestle at the original place. Once the egret starts to build nestle, the male bird and the female bird would work together with tacit understanding. Most of time, the male flies out looking for construction materials, while the female stays at home to build nestle.

When the new nestle is completed, egrets would carefully check it together for sure, and then wag their wings to declare their territory to the neighbors with constant cry. At this time egrets are the most active in their own territory, which is a certain area occupied by the egret during the breeding period around its nestle. No other birds, especially the same kind of the egret, would be allowed to enter. The male bird always stands at high place, guarding its territory and dispersing any invaders. Sometimes the female bird also joins in the battle, and the invader is often driven out with no place to hide. Some unwilling losers would come back silently when the male left for seeking food, and steal several branches from the nestle if the female did not notice. But when the male comes back, it would surely revenge, so a new battle for nestle is inevitable. The loser would quit depressingly and look for new territory somewhere else. If the defender and the invader play even, they would reach a compromise, becoming neighbors and co-existing in peace for a long time.

The stories of egrets regarding building nestle, repairing nestle and protecting their territory would last through the whole perching period of half a year, and most of interesting stories happen from early March to late April. The egret has usually found

its spouse already one month before building nestle, and in April and May the couple enters the climax of courting and breeding. At this time, various kinds of the egrets are all in their best conditions with shining feathers and well-developed wings, especially the two soft long feathers on the head of the Little Egret wave in the wind, beautiful and charming! Even though the Large Egret and the Intermediate Egret do not have head feathers, they have well-developed feathers on the chest and back. When courting, the female usually erects its feathers crying, and then squatting down while the male stretches two wings, erecting feathers and circling constantly around the female to show its strength and beauty. Some males would bring their lovers loathes, fish and earthworms, watching them enjoy the delicacy, and then they would dance the “Courting Waltz ” together.

The Little Egret usually lays 3-6 eggs each time, with an intermission of 24-36 hours for each egg. The eggs, in either olive or elliptical shapes, are as big as pigeon eggs in grey green color, about 45 mm long. Hatched by the parents in turns, the eggs would be carefully checked and rolled over when shifting. Generally speaking, the female hatches longer while the male seeks food and guards. In storm, the couple would squat together inside the nestle, and one bird would cover the other hatching one with wings against wind and rain. The love stories happened during the incubation period of 25 days is just as beautiful and touching as the love poetry. After the family is formed, the Egrets stick to the monogamy system. Once one bird died, the other would continue hatching and take care of the nestling. After a long time of marriage, some birds would like to look for new lovers.

The nestling would be jointly taken care by the parents, you can easily follow the continuing cry of the young bird to the nestle, and then just hide yourself nearby to wait for the parents to come back feeding the babies. When one bird feeds the young, the other would guard to prevent other birds from snatching food. When feeding, the young birds keep crying and shaking the body with mouths and wings open. The parents take food from their mouths to the young’ s. Sometimes, the nestling is so hungry as to tightly hold the parents’ mouths. What a touching scene! Most of the Egret’ s stories happen at the nestle, and often repeat for several times. For example, the Little Egret would repeatedly comb its feathers extremely gracefully several times a day, sometimes even over 10 times. If the sunlight just behind its wings, you may luckily see a beautiful scene, making you feel just like being in a fairyland.

When the nestlings grow up, the parents would gradually decrease food, and teach them to fly from the closer to the further place. In the daytime, the parents would lead the nestlings to seek food in the fields and ponds, and fly back to the nestle in the evening. If no interference, their flying route of everyday basically remains unchanged. In Oct. it is getting cold, and as late as in Mid-Oct., the Egret starts to migrate in-groups to the south. You may feel a miserable and intranquil atmosphere around the habitat. At this time, egrets would always move in-groups, and several families or groups follow one after the other closely, getting ready for migration. But those lately born young birds could not fly that far as they are still weak or sick. They have to stay in the habitat, and wait to die when the cold winter comes.

You may often find such a scene that the young birds stay closely against the strong cold wind, getting exhausted. In 1998, I took several photos of two egrets at the pond: a cold storm blew two young birds down into the pond, and one bird tried to get closer to the other weak one and to cover it with its small wings. When the cold dark night arrives, the poor two birds could not hold any longer, and both drowned in the pond. Viewing this miserable scene with our own eyes, I was deeply impressed by the cruel law of nature!

Only those art works full of the Egret' s interests could have eternal art charm. In the creation of art works, one should pay attention to the following four rules: First, try to catch the natural, true beauty of the egret; Secondly, try to use new angle, new discovery, new techniques, and new effects to express the beauty of novelty, avoiding the stiffness and coldness of popular science pictures; Third, try to express the vigor of the egret' s life, and create a kind of beauty which can arouse sympathy; Fourthly, try to avoid straightforwardness, and create a kind of reserved beauty. It is just because of their true, novel and touching interests as well as reserved beauty that many fine art works of egret from both at home and abroad are so pleasantly impressive.

Lawson David, an famous American egret photographer said: Shooting the egret is just like shooting soccer match, the equipment is the same, the requirement for basic training is the same, both need interests, feelings and strong professional spirit. The only difference between them is: when shooting the egret, you have to hide yourself, trying to get to the target as close as possible. So it would be more difficult and more laborious! This is what is rare in the creation of other kinds of arts. Of course, this is also the unique charm of shooting wild animals.

Gong Zheng

1999.8.

















