

may have several functions, including synchronizing reproductive behavior, but I have no evidence of this for Sooty Terns.

INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER SPECIES

PREDATORS

The isolation of most islands where Sooty Terns nest means that they come in contact with few vertebrate predators. Probably the most serious predator of adult Sooties at Bush Key is the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). In 1968 I saw a peregrine swoop at Sooty Terns 23 times without capturing a bird, but I did find the decapitated remains of four Sooties that the falcon almost certainly had killed.

At the Tortugas several other bird and animal species prey on the eggs and young of Sooties. I have seen both Ruddy Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) and a Purple Gallinule break and eat eggs, and the former has done so elsewhere (Ridley and Percy, 1958; Crossin and Huber, 1970). Rats are also known to take Sooty Tern eggs and chicks (Russell, 1938; Kepler, 1967).

Frigatebirds are perhaps the greatest threat to Sooty Tern chicks. At the Dry Tortugas Magnificent Frigatebirds have taken many chicks some years (Beard, 1939; Sprunt, 1948) while in 1968 I saw only one chick taken. When frigatebirds do prey on tern chicks, it seems to be a prey preference of only a few individuals rather than of all the frigatebirds present (Robertson, pers. comm.). Ashmole (1963) reports *Fregata aquila* taking many young Sooty Terns on Ascension Island, and *F. minor* does the same on Christmas Island (Ashmole and Ashmole, 1967).

On the Dry Tortugas migrating Cattle Egrets experience an extreme shortage of food and feed on almost anything they can find including an occasional Sooty Tern egg or chick (Robertson, pers. comm.) as well as fish dropped by the terns. Cattle Egret predation on Sooty Tern eggs and chicks is also known at the Seychelles (Ridley and Percy, 1958). The Great White Heron (*Ardea occidentalis*) also has been reported preying on Sooty Terns at the Tortugas (Robertson, 1962).

More commonly the Cattle Egrets forage on insects on Bush Key and in doing so disturb the adult terns from their care of their egg or chick, an activity that can be fatal to the offspring. Typically as an egret approaches a tern with an egg or chick, the tern faces the egret and gives a series of low, hoarse "wuk wuk" notes. As the egret comes closer the tern rises up off its egg or chick, erects the crown feathers, and continues to direct "wuk" calls at the egret, the calls becoming louder and more rapid and often changing to rapid "ka ka ak" calls. If the egret comes within a few feet of the tern, the tern flies from the scrape and circles over the egret until it departs. A few times a tern stretched its head and bill forward, raised the wings almost vertically, and ran at the egret.

Cattle Egrets often fly low over nesting terns, eliciting a long,