

AUG. 1913

SHOOTING UP AN EGRET ROOKERY



Alligator Bay rookery during the day when most of the parent birds are away, gathering food for their young

IN our July issue, we told of the visit of Messrs. W. S. Hanson and J. E. Burgert to the Alligator Bay rookery, where Mr. Charles Willis Ward placed a warden (Williams) last spring, for the purpose of protecting the egrets through their nesting and breeding season.

We present this month on these two pages, some photographs taken by Mr. Burgert on that trip, showing the Alligator Bay rookery, the camp of Warden Williams, together with its defenders—including courageous Charley Allen, who made it so hot for the marauders that they were driven off—and some of the results of the slaughter.

The following are excerpts from a letter from Mr. Hanson to Mr. Ward, relating the experience.

“FORT MYERS, FLA., 8th of May, 1913.

“MR. CHARLES W. WARD, Avery Island, La.

“DEAR MR. WARD:—I urged our going down to see the Mud Hole or Mud

Lake rookery and vicinity, so that I might be in a position to tell you. We got to Coot Bay same night we left Gator Bay, and, going to the farm of the Roberts Bros. (who, we had heard, were going to shoot the rookery), found they had gone (they reside over on the south side of the peninsula at the rear of Cape Sable), so we took it for granted that they had already shot out Mud Bay rookery; and as the little creek, or rather ditch, leading from Coot to Mud Bay is so difficult to get through, we decided to wait until the following morning before going there. * * *

“After great difficulty, we made it through to Mud Lake, which is an awful place, the mud composition being almost impenetrable, and had we not taken the plume hunter's narrow, double sharp-ended boat, we never would have made it.

“On arriving at the rookery we found a few roosting pelicans, cormorants, snake birds, etc., and hundreds of wood ibis and Louisiana herons, a few of which were nesting; many hundreds of empty nests of ibis, or maybe long whites, and possibly a half dozen fledged long whites that were alive, and gradually



The warden's camp and defenders of the rookery. Beginning from left—Charley Allen, who stood off the butchers; W. S. Hanson, Sam E. Williams, the warden; J. E. Burgert, photographer



Young egrets on the nest awaiting return of old birds



The Hoke Smith-Clapp Feather Co.'s "molted" plumage

starving, and, we estimated, possibly a hundred old long whites, but not a single long white with a plume to be seen. * * * *

"Everywhere in the rookery, which covered several acres, we found the remains of dead long whites and a few of the spoonbills that had been shot. There were many little long whites that had died in the nests, and their bodies had been eaten by the buzzards. The trees were full of shot from the guns of the murderers, and the sight was the saddest one I have ever seen of the sort. We found several fledged young long whites stalking about the island with wounded wings, that were possibly picking a living off the fish dropped by the wood ibis in the rookery. * * * *

"On entering the ditch leading into Mud Lake, we found a slit stick placed in the mouth of the ditch, with the name 'Eugene Roberts' written on it, and a note, warning any and all persons to come to the Roberts Bros.' camp before going to the rookery, which I possessed myself of, as I thought it might be useful to us as evidence. * * * *

"We got back to Alligator Bay on the 1st May, and when we arrived at the mouth of Chatham River at the Watson place, we found our boatman there who came to say that about 7 o'clock that morning he and the assistant warden were awakened by hearing shots at the rookery, and that on going out to the rookery they were fired at by the trespassers, and several rifle balls coming close to them, they were obliged to return to the shore. * * * *

"Our boatman was so scared that he got his things and came on to tell us, but Allen, the assistant warden, went on up the shore and kept firing at the men at the rookery until he saw them leave from the far side of the island, there being three men in the boat. He watched them until they had rounded the point where a little creek leads out from the bay. * * * *

"As we had left all the guns at the camp except a rifle that Williams had, we secured the loan of a shotgun from our boatman and a rifle from the boy at the Watson place, and we hurried to the camp as fast as we could, leaving our boatman and the boy, as he was too scared to return them, coming on in the afternoon, however. When we got as near as we could to the camp, we left the launch and walked on through the bushes, and found Allen with his rifle on his lap guarding the camp and rookery like a man. * * * *

"Late in the afternoon we saw a dead bird floating near the rookery and, on going over there, found seven dead long whites and one snowy heron. They had taken the plumes from five of the dead long whites, but had to leave so hurriedly that they had to leave the snowy and two long whites behind. * * * *

"We saw no signs of them during the day, and that night we put a string line across the creek near the camp, which Williams believed they would have to use to come out by, and we left a light burning in the tent, and stretched our bars in the bushes nearby, thinking the enemy might pass in the night and fire into the camp, in which case Burgess, the boatman, and myself were to return the fire from the camp, while Williams and his assistants were to hurry to the creek and try and kill the bunch. We saw no more of them, however. * * * *

"Suffice it to say, that, owing to Allen's nerve and determination and good shooting the Alligator Bay rookery was saved this season, and I don't believe they will have any more difficulty in future, as there seems to be universal respect for Williams and a general belief that he will protect the rookery. * * * *

It is now up to Florida to run these Roberts Bros. to earth and give them what is coming to them. The Fort Myers Board of Trade should take a hand in the chase and the prosecution. * * * *



What the butchers accomplished before being driven off



The only entrance to the Mud Hole rookery