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Observations on the American Flamingo by D.P. Ingraham, Pueblo, Col.

A few decades ago this beautiful bird was not uncommon along the Southern border of what is now the U.S., being found in almost every suitable locality from the mouth of Rio Grande to Cape Florida. Old navigators of the Miss have told me that they have seen it in the lagoons far up the river toward Vicksburg. Questionable whether it found its desirable food above tide water. Never heard of it feeding in other than salt or brackish water. In these days the only locality that I have been able to learn of is the extreme western and southern coast of Florida.

Most of its feeding is done at night or early in the morning or late in the evening. Very wary-- bottom so soft very difficult for any heavy object to approach. Larger part of day is spent far out from shore where the flock may be seen sleeping, in short, restless cat-naps.

Each adult, especially the male, acts as a guard to the entire flock. Scarcely a moment when one bird does not have his head raised.

First tried red flannel shirt and head rag but that didn't matter. He would give that peculiar note of warning which sounds so much like the sharp guttural expression of the word "gong." Walk off with that stalking dignity known only to flamingo.

Tied limbs of bushes together made moving screen, half an hour to move hundred yards, barely succeeded in getting within 150 or 125 yards. Killed birds over 125 yds. Birds ordinarily very fat taken a pint of oil.

Took inside passage from island of Marco toward the bay to the south of Cape Romano and turned off into a narrow passage leading into Caxambas Bay some ten miles north of Cape Romano. This bay charact

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eristic feeding ground for the Flamingo whose food is small mollusks crustaceans and other marine animals gathered from the mud. (Cf Chap an

Natives in West Indies say the b rd lives on dirt. Must all be crushed. Long legs go up and down like a regiment marking time. When through frquently be a mound five or six inches high and three or four feet across.

Caxambas Bay is perhaps five miles across in either direction and the larger portion of it so shallow that a boat drawing fifteen inc of water can only pass over it at high tide. It is connected with the Gulf of Mexico by a narrow pass, little more than 10~ yds wide. The bottom of the larger portion of the bay is soft mud which has evidently been carried in through the pass from the Gulf or brought down from the neighboring mangrove islands where it has been accumulating for ages. M Mud to the shoulders. The bird is web-footed to enable it to walk in this soft mud, and not to swim. I have never seen one aloght on the wxt water or take to the water beyond its wading depth unless wounded. But they can rise from deep water, as I have seen a wounded bird do when he was able to fly but a few hundred yards.

We reached the little bay an hour or two before sunset; but the water was so low that we struck bottom and were compelled to anchor for the night. At daylight the followin morning we weighed anchor and after proceeding a few hundred yars came in sight of a flock of seven beautiful flamingos(e) the first that I have ever seen aloive. They were feeding not far from a small island that sheltered them from view from our anchorage. We at once down sail and attempted to reach the island with our small boat, which didnât require more than five inches; but we foun more mud than water and were compelled to give it up and wait the incoming tide. A little before night when we deemed there was water eno we started fo the island and after reaching it covered out little boat with the boughs of trees. At dusk we moved out around the point of the

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island. The tide was high; the birds were feeding toward the island and did not seem to notice us until we were within about 125 yards of them when one bird raised his head, gave his peculiar note of alarm and took wing. But before the others could rise I gave them a shot which resulted in the best bird in the flock being left on the water. Birds did no return, cont. course southward.

Two days later anchored east of eastern most Cape Sable. Early next morning flock of 31 flamingoes flew past us eastward--followed them. Sailor forty years before had gone flamingo hunting in summer when birds were moulting. Natives took large numbers of them for food during that season when the birds cannot fly, the feathers so few and the body so heavy. The plan adopted is for a number of persons to go out with long ropes, surround a flock, drive them together in a huddle, the stretch a line of rope around them and at a given signal rush toward the flock. The birds attempt to run past pursuers but are tripped up by the rope. When trown down in the water it takes them some moments to regain their feet and so their captors gather them in. Fifty years ago taken in large numbers and sold for food in Key West, Flesh oil and shellfishy.

Late in the pm we entered a bay about seven by fifteen mi in extent almost every square rod of which was shallow enough to be waded by the flamingo. The bottom largely consisted of a soft sticky clay, so soft that with one hand I could set a pole two fathoms down in the mud and so sticky that one can not wash the mud, from anything without scrubbing it. Although the water in these bays is so shallow, not above 18 inches, it is so permeated with this soft mud (white) which is stirred up by the action of the waves that it is impossible to see the bottom and after a day or two of heavy wind the whole bay remains one of a bowl of milk.

Half way across the bay at ebb tide our boat stuck

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in the mud. I climbed to masthead. Almost to the east of us where the then setting sun reflected the light to the best advantage, was a long line of red extending half a mile, like a prairie fire at night. It was then I realized the import of the word flamingo--flame colored.

Flock nearly four miles off. Early start next morning. Before daylight. When more than half a mile from the birds rose on the wind and after turning about a few times flew to extreme further part of bay and alighted. The flock consisted of not less than 2500, seven miles away.

Next daylight boats covered with bushes, no success. Six days a week for six weeks tried everything. always saw flock of 2500 but never got nearer. Couldn't get within 800 yds of them. Got six birds by waiting where they flew over water between two points of land. Would not fly over land. Whenever a bird was wounded and yet able to fly it would leave the flock and thus we secured one or two. In one case bird flew nearly a mile before it came down on the water dead.

Better success in West Indies.

People living on islands se of Cape Sable are of the opinion that the birds all go to Cuba and the Bahamas (He doesn't think so)

Judge that life must be fully 50 years. Birds of first year nearly grey but after it sheds its first winter plumage is become reddish. Evident they do not reach their full brightness until 7th yr. Dingy after first of April--do not nest until last of May or June. Largest 64 inches high. Wounded birds may no resistance. Drops down and sticks his head under water. Rarely able to drive a wounded bird on land.

We were watching a flock of 300 or more, standing at rest some 400 yds from shore. About an hour before sunset a few birds commenced to feed and soon a dozens or two of the largest males began to march back-

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ward and forward in the rear of the flock. Nearly every male soon joined
The line of the flock lay about parallel with the shore and the males took
took their position directly in the rear in a solid body. As though at
a given signal every bird commenced to march, passing to the extreme
further end of the flock and halted, making a great noise. After a moment
pause all faced about, marched back to the other end of the line and
cried again. They moved like a platoon of soldiers. Thus the parade
continued for nearly an hour until one by one the birds dropped out of
the ranks and commenced to feed.