

Great Egret *Ardea alba* preys on Smooth-billed Ani *Crotophaga ani* in Tobago, West Indies

On 21 November 2022, at approximately 0830h, I was birding at the Centre Street Ponds, Canaan, Tobago. A Smooth-billed Ani *Crotophaga ani* landed near the water, possibly to take a drink, in close proximity to a Great Egret *Ardea alba*. The egret stealthily moved in on the ani and captured it. The egret then bashed it around until the ani was still. The egret then made several attempts to position the ani in its bill so it could be swallowed (Fig. 1). Meanwhile, another Great Egret flew in next to the first egret, and attempted to steal its prey. The first egret flew off to the other side of the pond with the ani, where it finally swallowed it, undisturbed.

This observation appears to be the first record of a Great Egret preying on a Smooth-billed Ani. Quinn and Startek-Foote (2020) mention the Smooth-billed Ani being taken as prey by some raptors, but not by egrets or herons. Anis are gregarious and employ a sentinel system with one bird usually positioned at an open, elevated site (Quinn and Startek-Foote 2020). The sentinel presumably warns others of raptors above. In the case at hand, one lone individual ani may have left the group and come to the water's edge for a drink, and in this vulnerable moment was snatched by the much larger, statue-like, opportunistic Great Egret. McCrimmon *et al.* (2020) documented a variety of prey species of the Great Egret, including insects, fishes, frogs, snakes, small mammals, and a few species of birds. The southeast Asian subspecies *A. a. modesta* has been observed preying on crakes *Porzana*, kingfishers *Halycon*, sparrows *Passer*, white-eyes *Zosterops*, swallows *Hirundo*, and terns *Sterna*, and the African subspecies *A. a. melanorhynchos* has been observed feeding Common Gallinule *Gallinula galeata* to chicks (McCrimmon *et al.* 2020).

On 23 February 2023 I was again at the ponds in Canaan, when I saw a Great Egret attempting to swallow a dead Carib Grackle *Quiscalus lugubris*. Photos of this encounter are posted on eBird <https://ebird.org/checklist/S129488758>. I could not determine whether the Egret killed



Fig. 1. Great Egret eating a Smooth-billed Ani, Canan Tobago, 21 November 2022. Photo Matt Kelly.

the grackle or attempted to scavenge a dead individual. In light of the previous observation, this could have been the same Great Egret that captured the Smooth-billed Ani.

REFERENCES

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