

5-92-23

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

LITTLE BLUE HERON

Egretta caerulea

Location: Olive Marsh; Pueblo; Pueblo County, Colorado

Date: April 22, 1992

This bird was discovered by David Silverman.

Setting:

This bird was found by David Silverman several days previously and was seen by many birders in the Pueblo area including Brandon Percival and Van Truan. I believe that it was last seen on April 23. The bird spent most of its time at the extreme west edge of Olive Marsh. This area borders Pueblo Boulevard. It is a string of three very small shady ponds with mud and cattail edge that forms the open end of a short stretch of marshy ponds. Olive Marsh is situated in the riparian corridor on the north bank of the Arkansas River in Pueblo.

I found the bird about 7:30 a.m. and watched it for 15 minutes. The morning was sunny and clear and the viewing conditions were excellent. The sun was from my back and left as I observed the bird. I first found it at the southernmost pond. It flew up from the muddy edge and an earthworm dangled from its bill as it flew off. It landed in a bare, scraggly tree in the next pond and ate the worm. It remained at that perch until I walked to within 30 yards when it flew a short distance to the last pond. It landed on a fencepost on the edge of that pond and perched facing me. It allowed me to approach very closely, to within about 40 feet, where I observed it for several minutes with B & L Elite 10X42 binoculars.

Description:

The bird stood about 24" tall but was probably about 22" long from bill to tail. It was a small slender heron about the size and shape of a Snowy Egret. In flight it had shallow, quick, buoyant wingbeats, unlike larger herons.

It was overall slaty blue-gray and appeared to be an adult in non-breeding condition. The legs were long and grey. The feet were grey. The bill was sharp, pointed and dagger-like; bluish-gray basally, grading into black distally. The small patch of bare skin around the eye was dull gray. The head and neck was a deep, dull purplish-gray. This purplish color blended gradually into the uniform blue-gray color lower on the neck. The neck was very slender and snaky. The bird lacked any ornamental plumes on the head or neck but a few small blue-gray feathers hung over the back and were as long as the tail. The tail and underparts were also blue-gray.

Similar Species:

The long legs, long slender neck, and short dagger-like bill eliminate all but herons. Great Blue Heron is too large with black, white and grey in plumage. Night-Herons are too stocky with patterns of black on their head and/or back. Tricolored Heron is white underneath, longer-billed and white on the fore neck. Reddish Egret is most similar, but is much larger, has a pink-based bill, and has more orange tones to the neck with this coloration extending onto breast.

Experience with Species:

I have experience with all North American herons and egrets including Reddish Egret, Tricolored Heron and Little Blue Herons as recently as March 1991 in south Florida.

This report is prepared from notes made during and after observation.

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