

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

5-95-7

ACCEPTED

LITTLE BLUE HERON

Egretta caerulea

Location: A small pond approximately 1/2 mile S.E. of Holbrook Res.; near Rocky Ford; Otero County, Colorado

Date: April 24, 1994

Setting:

This bird was found by myself and Brandon Percival. We stopped at this small, shallow, open farm pond about 10:00 a.m. The Little Blue Heron was feeding at the shallowest (west) end in the company of a few Am. Avocets. It fed slowly, walking along in water just inches deep. It occasionally stopped feeding to stand still or to stand and preen. We watched the bird for about 10 minutes at approximately 250 yards with binoculars and scope (Kowa TSN4 20-60x). The sky was sunny and viewing conditions were excellent. We did not see the bird in flight.

Description:

The bird stood about 20" tall. Even at first glance in the binoculars it was a small, slender and evenly, all-dark heron; clearly not a Great Blue. It was most like a Snowy Egret in body shape and size, being slim and rather long- and snaky-necked.

The bird was a dark greyish-blue overall. In the scope however, the head and neck were a different color than the greyer back, being deep reddish-purple. This purplish color did not extend down onto the breast. The forecrown was grey. We could see a few short, spiky plumes laying off the back of the head, and a few more hanging off the back, past the tail, indicating a breeding-plumaged bird. The bill was long and pointed and was clearly two-toned, being light grey at the base and then gradually turning nearly black on the distal half. The facial skin appeared grey but we were too far away to accurately gauge this. The legs were long and grey. The feet were dull grey.

Similar Species:

The long legs, long slender neck, and medium, sharp bill indicate a heron. The Great Blue Heron is much larger with other colors (black, white and grey) in its plumage. Night-Herons are much stockier and shorter-necked with black on the head and/or back. The Tricolored Heron is white underneath, has white on the neck and has a bigger bill, proportionately. The Reddish Egret is most similar, and the hardest I.D. challenger. However it is larger than the Little Blue, has a pink-based bill that is more sharply two-toned ("dipped in ink" appearance), and has a brighter, more orange color to the neck feathers, this coloration extending well onto the 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 1994 in south Texas).

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



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