

Accepted (7-0)

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

LITTLE BLUE HERON

Egretta caeruleaLocation: Lake Holbrook, near Rocky Ford, Otero County, ColoradoDate: May 8, 1995Setting:

This bird was found by Brandon Percival about a week before. I was driving by Lake Holbrook about 5:35 p.m. and found the Little Blue Heron in the southwest corner of the lake. It was heavily overcast. The bird was perched on a small branch sticking out of a flooded meadow ringed by small cottonwoods. I stopped and set up my scope (Kowa TSN4 20-60x) in the car and observed the bird at about 50 yards distance for about 10 minutes. Brandon was following me in his car and also stopped and observed this bird. I got out of my car and flushed the bird. It flew a short distance directly away from me, just over the water and landed in the water.

Description:

The bird was a first year immature. It was about 20" tall. It was about the size of a nearby adult Snowy Egret. At first glance in the binoculars it was a small, dingy white heron. Although primarily white, I could see that in the scope it had a number of grey-blue smudges, especially on the back. The secondaries were mixed, white or blue grey. The bird had white head plumes. The facial skin was grey. The iris was pale yellow. The legs and feet were greyish green. The bill was long and straight, fairly pointed. It was deeper and less acute the Snowy Egret and was distinctly two-toned in color, grey at the base and black at the tip. The bill was plainly larger than that of the Snowy Egret in direct comparison.

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. No other heron has a "calico" plumage with interspersed white and grey feathers. The small body size, straight two-toned bill, and grey-green legs rule out any other than Little Blue.

Experience with Species:

I have experience with all North American herons and egrets including Reddish Egret, Tricolored Heron and Little Blue Herons (including birds in this plumage).

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

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Colorado Field Ornithologists-Sight Record Form

Species: Little Blue Heron. Scientific Name: *Egretta caerulea*.

Date: April 29 & May 8, 1985.

Number of birds seen: 1. Sex: unknown. Plumage: immature molting into adult.

Locality: A pond just east of Lake Holbrook on Road FF and on the Southwest side of Lake Holbrook.

Nearest town: Rocky Ford. County: Otero.

Times Observed: 8:20AM-8:50AM and 9:45AM-10:00AM on 4/29 and 4:15-4:30PM on 5/8.

Duration of observation: 1 hour total.

Other observers with me: None when I first found it, later Pearle Sandstrom-Smith, Cliff Smith on 4/29 and Mark Janos on 5/8.

Other observers who saw the bird independently: David Silverman, Anne Whitfield, George McKinnon, Leon Bright and maybe others.

Light conditions: excellent.

Optical equipment used: 10X40 Bausch&Lomb Binoculars, 15-60X B&L Spotting Scope, and KOWA TSN-4 Spotting Scope.

Distance from bird: 20 to 100 yards.

Describe the bird's behavior: The bird stood still most of the time when seen on the pond and then the bird was walking fast looking for food. When it was on the SW side of Lake Holbrook it was seen sitting on a tumbleweed near a Snowy Egret.

Describe the bird: The size of the bird was about 24 inches (about six inches taller than the near by American Avocets in the pond and about same size as the Snowy Egret). The overall shape was typical heron shaped. The plumage of the bird was a molting immature (which means 1st year spring immature). The color pattern is as follows: the bill was two-toned, blackish at tip and blueish at base. The eye's color was yellow. The head was white. The longish neck was also white. The back was white until the wind blew the feathers around, I saw darker blue or gray coming in. The tail was all white except for the tip, it was blueish (which eliminates Snowy Egret). The throat of the bird was white. The chin was also white. The breast and all underparts were all white. The legs and feet were greenish and not yellow. The bill shape was thin and not as long as other heron's bill. The shape of the wings were typical heron shaped. The tail was also typical heron shaped. I identified the bird by it's heron shape, dark tips to the end of the tail and by it's greenish legs.

Describe the bird's song and calls: No sounds we heard.

Describe the habitat: The bird was seen in a pond with reeds and other marsh grasses around it. Also on the SW corner of Lake Holbrook a man-made reservoir in Southeastern Colorado.

How did you eliminate similar species: Snowy Egret: This species has black legs with yellow feet and the plumage is all white with no dusky tips.

Great, Cattle, and Reddish Egrets: All of these species are either bigger or do not have the green legs in breeding plumage.

What is your prior experience with this species and other similar species: Little Blue

Heron: 4 previous in Colorado (Immature OF&I Lakes, Pueblo Co. August 9, 1990, adult Olive Marsh, Pueblo Co. April 21, 1992, adult at the pond east of Holbrook, Otero Co. April 24, 1994 and adult Ireland Reservoir June 7, 1994. Also several in San Diego, California in 1993.

Snowy, Cattle and Great Egrets: Many in Colorado over the years and many of each in California.

Reddish Egret: One dark phase immature at Lake Holbrook, Colorado September 1-25, 1994. The 4th Colorado Record.

List Books I've helped with identification: National Geographic Society's Birds of North America.

This report was made with notes taken during sighting.

Reporting observer: Brandon K. Percival. Signature: *Brandon K. Percival*

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