

Bob Richter

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To Whom This May Concern:

Re: Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violaceus*)Location, Time, and Setting:

At about 10:30 am on Sunday, May 19, on a scheduled D.F.O. field trip to Bonnie Res., Yuma Co, Ric Olson alerted us that a night heron was in flight. We were all standing in the middle of the riparian area adjacent to the Wagon Wheel Campground when we were called to "birding attention" by Ric's announcement. The night heron landed on a horizontal branch about twenty feet up in a deciduous tree that was about fifteen yards away. Our viewing advantage was excellent with the sun to our right (from the east) and slightly behind us. The day was clear, sunny with gusty winds from the north.

Details:

We were first impressed by the structure of the night heron when it initially landed, as it appeared proportionally long-legged and long-necked. While it perched, we noted the heron was not an adult but was most likely a first spring type, as the heron showed no spotting on the plain darkish gray-brown back or wings. The head pattern was not that of an adult as it was plain and patternless with less streaking on the sides of its face than a first fall Yellow-crowned Night Heron would demonstrate. There was no dark contrasting mantle patch. We quickly focused in on the bill which appeared all dark. We all felt that we were close enough to the heron so if there was paleness to the base of the lower mandible we could have seen it. Most importantly the appearance of the bill was dagger-shaped with equal curvature of the lower and the upper mandibles at the distal end. The ventral side of the lower mandible was not straight as appears on the Black-crowned Night Heron. After watching the night heron for apx. 5 minutes, it took flight and clearly not only the feet but a good portion of the tarsus extended beyond the tail. Dave Quesenberry astutely noticed when the heron was in flight that the dorsal flight feathers were darker and contrasted with the wing coverts.