

## COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

1999 - 14

NEW STATE RECORD        UNUSUAL RECORD XACCEPT 7-0  
Red 1/5/00 up  
(2 photos)Species: Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*)

Date: 22 May 1999

Number seen: one

Sex: ?

Plumage: Alternate

Locality: Sawhill Ponds

Elevation: about 5470'

Nearest town: Boulder

County: Boulder

Time observed: about 18:40 - 18:55 MDT

Duration of observation: about 15 minutes

**Description:** I went to Sawhill Ponds to look for the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (YCNH) that had been found that morning by Cliff Bruning (I believe) and seen again in the early afternoon by Doug Faulkner. After some fruitless searching, I finally found the bird on the pond at which it had been reported earlier.

It was a smallish heron perched on a small gravel island with some shrubs. It was obviously a night-heron, being stocky with a short, but thick-based dark bill. The head was dark with a creamy yellow forehead and crown and an off-white oval patch behind and below the eye. There were at least a couple long whitish plumes that extended from the back of the crown and hung down the back of the neck. The eyes were reddish-orange. The upperparts were dark blue-gray and the underparts were a paler blue-gray with a strong brown cast. The wings were approximately the same color as the upperparts, but most of the coverts were fringed with whitish, making them look paler. Its legs were dirty yellow. The bird spent most of the time I viewed it hunkered with its head pulled down. At one point when I was attempting to get a bit closer for better photographs, it stretched its neck, which was still rather short for a heron.

Similar species eliminated: Despite being closely related, the Black-crowned Night-Heron is not really a confusion species for an adult YCNH. In the posture that the bird was in most of the time, the real confusion species is Great Blue Heron (GBHE). When a GBHE has its neck scrunched down, what is visible is a darkish gray-blue heron with a pale crown, dark stripe above the eye, and a pale area below and behind the eye. I have been struck by the similarity of head plumage many times. However, this bird's eyes were surrounded by blackish, not white as in GBHE, and the whole head was blackish, save for the crown and facial patch, unlike the mostly pale head of adult GBHEs. GBHEs also always show some strong yellow coloration on their longer bills, which this bird did not show. Besides, the bird was nowhere near tall enough for a GBHE.

**Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration):** No vocalizations heard.

**What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species?** I have seen 100s each of YCNHs and 1000s of GBHEs.

**Light conditions:** sun was mostly behind slightly-broken overcast

**Optical equipment used:** Zeiss 7x42 and Kowa 30x

**Distance, and how estimated:** estimated at about 20 meters

**Other observers who saw the bird with you:** Tim Mitzen

**Other observers who saw the bird independently:** Doug Faulkner and the finder of the bird, Cliff Bruning

**If photographed, type of equipment and film:** I photographed with a Canon rig with a 300mm lens with a 1.4x teleconverter; slides are included with documentation.

**List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:**

**a) at time of observation:** none

**b) after observation:** none

**Reporting observer:** Tony Leukering

**Signature:**



**Address:** Colorado Bird Observatory, 13401 Picadilly Road, Brighton, CO 80601

**Date report was written:** 3 December 1999 from memory and with reference to my photoes of the bird

Yellow-crowned Night Heron  
Sawhill Ponds, BOULDER, CO

5/22/99

T. Leukering

1999-14

