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2003-86

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

rec'd 11/30/03

SPECIES: Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (YCNH) Nycticorax violaceus

DATES: September 19 - October 11, 2003

NUMBER: one sex: ? plumage: juvenal

LOCATION: Belmar Historic Park, Kountz Lake  
Jefferson County, Lakewood Elev. 5500 ft.

OBSERVED: Many hours from 7 am - 1 pm off-and-on over entire period

others: Warren Finch, Ric Olson, Joey Kellner, Peter Gent, Dick Schottler  
and many others. (Ric took photos.)

LIGHT: sunlight on all sides to overcast conditions

EQUIPMENT: Kowa TSN-4 with 20-60 zoom and Swarovski bino, 8 x 56

DISTANCE: 20 ft. (we both jumped with surprise!) to 100 yds.

PHOTOS: Ric Olson, Randy Seibert, Bill Schmoker, Andrew Spencer and others

HABITAT: Kountz Lake is a small lake, fairly shallow (5'-14'), dammed at the south end and located in an urban park, much of which is grasslands, wetland and riparian vegetation. (See Oct. 2002 JCF, p. 186-192 article by Finch and Schofield for more detail.) A variety of ducks, gulls, geese, cormorants, Snowy Egrets, and as many as 6 Black-crowned Night-Herons (BCNH) (aged juvenile to adult) were on the lake.

BEHAVIOR: mostly very quietly standing on 1 or 2 legs on rocks along dam at the edge of the water, feeding, resting, and preening. Sometimes slowly walking over rocks or occasionally flying across open water, gliding to a new site. Never saw it roosting in a tree, although may have done so when not observed for several hours at a time on some days.

Prey: crayfish (some 6-7" long), aquatic mollusks/snails, small fish. YCNH attempted to swallow what looked like a sunfish, but couldn't work it past the bill in spite of many attempts.

One morning, 2 adult, 1 second year, and 3 juv. BCNH as well as 2 Snowy Egrets were lined along the dam with the YCNH for exceptional comparison opportunities. The YCNH did not flush easily; watched walkers and their dogs on path that traverses length of dam.

DESCRIPTION: Medium-sized wading species, height that of alert Black-crowned Night-Heron (Nycticorax nycticorax) (BCNH), but looked more regal, with slender build, long neck and legs, especially when in alert posture. Even when feeding, it did not assume the hump-backed, crouched posture of BCNH. While BCNH seemed to remain "frozen" over long periods of time when stalking prey, the YCNH was more likely to bend over from an upright posture with minimal knee bend and stalk for much briefer intervals.

UPPERS: Overall uppers were more slate gray than brown, with fine white streaking and spots.

Head: oval shaped; appeared smaller than BCNH's. Stout, pointed, thick bill - dark gray maxilla (upper bill); mandible (lower bill) dark with narrow yellowish underside. Bill appeared more stunted/bulbous than



DESCRIPTION cont.

long, tapered BCNH bill. Forehead angled steeply to base of bill. Eyes prominent with golden irises. Heavy concentration of fine white streaks covered entire head, including chin, nape and hindneck, except for mostly solid gray crown and gray facial skin in area of lores.

Body: slate-gray mantle, scapulars, wing coverts sparsely to generously covered with small white "spots", most of which appeared triangular ( $\Delta$ ) in shape when viewed at close range. An especially striking pattern appeared on the greater secondary coverts: each feather was tipped with a white triangle and edged with white. Dark gray primaries reached to tip of short tail.

In flight, all remiges and tail appeared solid slate gray, contrasting boldly with the spotted uppers. Wing tips were rounded.

UNDERPARTS: white/creamy white with heavy gray streaking from throat to near vent, including flanks. Depending on posture, streaking could appear narrow or broader. Undertail coverts were white.

Legs/feet: yellow/gray color with tarsus/tibia joint (ankle) somewhat brighter yellow. Most of the time, the ankle showed well below the belly, giving a long-legged impression. Long, narrow toes had minimal webbing at base of toes; nails were black. All toes and lower tarsus extended beyond tail in flight.

VOCALIZATION: none

SIMILAR SPECIES: Juvenile BCNH generally more squatty and slouchy/humpback in posture. Overall plumage color is brown with larger white/creamy tear-drop and long triangular-shaped spots on wing coverts and back. Covert (greater secondary) feathers lack sharp, white edging of YCNH. Facial skin in loreal region of BCNH is yellow-green compared to grayish on YCNH. BCNH seems shorter-legged and -necked, but YCNH sometimes assumed a similar posture. In flight, only toes seen extending beyond tip of tail. *Legs yellower.*

Juvenile American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) or even adult could appear similar, although Bittern is larger and heavier in size; brown uppers lack white streaking and spots. Has dark malar stripe, is more secretive and has a unique, bill-pointed-to-the-sky alarm pose. Bill longer and more narrow. Underparts are dramatically patterned with bold brown stripes; legs are green.

PRIOR EXPERIENCE: no records of Juv. YCNH, but have seen adults in Tx., Fl., and out of U.S. Have seen many BCNH and American Bitterns, all ages.

BOOKS: Sibley Guide to Birds to confirm greater secondary covert pattern.

Notes: made ✓ during ✓ after observation.

Date of report: 10- 27- 2003

REPORTING OBSERVER: Karleen Schofield *Karleen Schofield*  
33 Yates St., Denver, Co. 80219 303-936-8661

rec'd  
11/19/04

CFO-ORC FILE # 2003-86

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD \_\_\_\_\_ UNUSUAL RECORD X

**Species:** Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*)

**Date:** 20 September 2003 **Number seen:** one **Sex:** unknown **Plumage:** juvenile

**Locality:** Belmar Park

**Elevation:** ~5,300 feet

**Nearest town:** Lakewood

**County:** Jefferson

**Time observed:** late afternoon

**Duration of observation:** approximately 20 minutes total

**Description:** Long-legged, but squat wader, spending a lot of time in tangled branches just above waterline a small pond in the park. Plumage overall was very streaky and speckled. The upper- and underparts had brownish basal color, except for the vent region which was solidly white. The underparts had long, bold, w distinguishable streaks. Upperpart feathering had large, white tips giving a very speckled appearance. The wing coverts also had this "speckled" effect. The greater coverts also had wide, white edgings. The head basal color was more ashy gray, darker on the crown than on the sides of the head. The sides of the head were also streaky, joining with the streaking on the underparts, but were of a finer nature. Feathering on the chin extended away from the head along the lower mandible past the frontal plane of the forehead. The gill was of medium length, dagger-shaped with a wide base ending in a blunt tip. The irises were orange-re The legs dark, with hint of yellow around the ankles and toes.

**Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration):** None heard.

**What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species?** I have seen dozens in the southeast and one adult in Colorado.

**Light conditions:** Partly cloudy.



**Optical equipment used:** Zeiss 7x42 binocs and Kowa scope with 20-60x zoom lens

**Distance, and how estimated:** closest at about 15 meters

**Other observers who saw the bird with you:** Jim and Karen Schmoker, Loch Kilpatrick, Ira Sanders, Tammy Ellsworth

**Other observers who saw the bird independently:** Karleen Schofield, Warren Finch, m.ob.

**If photographed, type of equipment and film:** Nikon Coolpix 4500 through scope

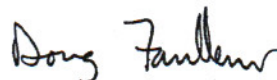
**List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:**

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

**b) after observation:** National Geographic 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.

**Reporting observer:** Doug Faulkner

**Signature:**



**Address:** Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, 14500 Lark Bunting Lane, Brighton, CO 80603

**Date report was written:** 8 January 2004 from photos

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**Colorado Field Ornithologists Sight Record Form**  
(Please print or type. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.)

**Each table cell will automatically enlarge as you type!**

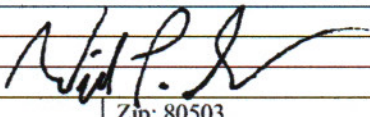
CBRC FILE #: 2003-86		
RESULTS:		
Species: (Common Name) Yellow-crowned Night-Heron		(Scientific Name) Nyctanassa violacea
Date(s) of occurrence: 22 Sep 03		
Number of birds seen: 1	Sex: ?	Plumage: Juvenile
Exact location: Belmar Park		
County: Jefferson	Nearest town: Lakewood	Elevation:
Length of observation: About 1 hour		Time(s) of observation: about 8-9 am
Other observers who saw the bird(s) with you: Karleen Schofield, Jim & Karen Schmoker, M. Ob.		
Other observers who independently saw the bird(s): M. Ob.		
Light conditions (quality; direction relative to bird(s) and observers position: Good light		
Optical equipment used: Kowa TSN 824 + 27X LER + Nikon Coolpix 4500 also Nikon D100 + 80-400 VR		
Distance to bird(s) (estimated, unless otherwise noted): About 10 meters at closest		
Was (Were) bird(s) photographed? Yes		If so, are you submitting photos? Yes
Who took the photograph(s)? Bill Schmoker		
Describe the general and specific habitats in which the bird(s) occurred: Suburban Park with lake		
Describe the bird's (birds') behaviors, particularly behaviors that were used in supporting the identification, e.g., flying, feeding, habits: The bird was hunting along a rip-rap shoreline pretty actively. I observed it catching and eating two large crayfish in the hour or so I watched the bird. It took a couple of short flights to re-position itself. For quite a while it was only about 10 meters from a paved trail with significant pedestrian and canine traffic. The bird didn't seem to care as long as nothing came right at it.		
DESCRIPTION - Long legs, upright stance, long neck, and long bill identify this as a wading bird. Bill heavy for a heron, mostly dark, pale gray-yellow base. Head gray streaked with lighter gray. Iris rich orange. Neck gray with pale streaking, heavier on the throat. Belly gray with heavy light streaking. Legs and feet kind of a dirty yellow-orange. Back and wings gray overall, with very neat, small triangular white spots on the tips of many back and wing feather tracts (scapulars, wing coverts, etc.) Wing coverts also have thin white edges. Very close in size to nearby adult Black-crowned Night-Heron		
Describe the bird's (birds') call(s) and/or song(s), if noted: n/a		
SIMILAR SPECIES - Other Herons & Egrets lack the combination of traits that identify this bird as a Night-Heron. Plumage rules out adult Night-Herons. Juvenile BCNH has a bit longer bill, more yellow in the bill, and a lighter colored iris. Also, the neat triangular spots are not seen in juv BCNH. I find the streaking on the neck and breast to be more tidy and contrasting than in juv BCNH.		
What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species? This is the first YCNH I've seen. I've seen many juv and adult BCNHs.		
List books, guides, recordings, or other sources consulted and how these influenced your identification (during and after observation): Sibley Guide to Birds		
This report was made from: Notes and photographs taken during observation.		
Date and time of written report: 8 Jan 04		
Reporting observer: William P Schmoker		Signature: 
Reporting observer's address: 3381 Larkspur Dr.		
City: Longmont	State: CO	Zip: 80503



Photo 22 Sep 03  
Belmar Park





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**Colorado Field Ornithologists Sight Record Form**

(Please print or type. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.)

CBRC FILE #:

**RESULTS:**Species: **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron**Scientific Name: *Nyctanassa violacea*Date(s) of occurrence: **9/24/03**Number of birds seen: **1**Sex: **?**Plumage: **juvenile**Exact location: **S shore of Kountze Lake, Belmar Park, Lakewood**County: **Jefferson**Nearest town: **Lakewood**Elevation: **approx. 1 mile**Length of observation: **approx. 30 min.**Time(s) of observation: **8:00 – 8:30 AM**Other observers who saw the bird(s) with you: **Andrew Spencer and Karleen Schofield**Other observers who independently saw the bird(s): **many**Light conditions (quality; direction relative to bird(s) and observer's position: **The sun was low in the east; the bird was to our west in full sun.**Optical equipment used: **Nikon Fieldscope ED with 20-45x zoom eyepiece**Distance to bird(s) (estimated, unless otherwise noted): **80-90 yards**Was (Were) bird(s) photographed? **yes, by Andrew Spencer**If so, are you submitting photos? **no**Who took the photograph(s)? **Andrew Spencer**Describe the general and specific habitats in which the bird(s) occurred: **half-rocky, half-muddy lakeshore near cover**Describe the bird's (birds') behaviors, particularly behaviors that were used in supporting the identification, e.g., flying, feeding, habits: **the bird mostly stood on the bank in one spot, though it did catch one or two prey items while we watched. It stretched out its neck in alarm a few times, but never flushed, even though nearby Black-crowned Night-Herons and Snowy Egrets did.**

**DESCRIPTION – The bird was clearly an immature night-heron. Its plumage was generally dark brown with whitish streaks. Its crown was slightly more blackish with the white streaking nearly absent; where present, on the distal portion of the crown, the streaking was extremely fine. The bird's back was mostly brown, with extremely small white spots, perhaps one on each feather. The front of the bird had whitish streaks which were longer and wider than elsewhere on the bird; they were rather ill-defined. The white streaking on the cheeks was finer than on the breast, but this area looked rather more white than dark overall. The bird's flight feathers were dark, without white spots. All of the wing coverts, however, sported distinct white edgings and sharply defined white triangles at each feather tip. The triangles were nearly equilateral and all pointed up. The bird's tail was uniformly dark above; its undertail coverts were white.**

**The eye of the bird was very large and prominent. Its iris was dark orange. It had a very thick, fairly blunt bill, which was a dark (blackish) horn color, with greenish areas along the top and especially the bottom edges; these greenish areas were wider proximally. The different colors on the bill blended smoothly; there was no impression of patchiness. The black color extended proximally to the front margin of the eye; in this area, only a little square patch below the eye was green, and its contrast with the rest of the bill was small. The bill was perhaps 1 to 1.25 times the length of the head.**

**The angle at which the forehead met the bill was steep—very close to 90 degrees. The crown feathers were held slightly fluffed, making the crown look very high and the head very rounded. The feathers on the bird's chin extended out along the bottom edge of the bill; where they ended, they also formed a steep angle with the bill (nearly 90 degrees).**

**When alarmed, the bird stretched its neck out. Its neck was very long for a night-heron, almost as long proportionally as that of a Snowy Egret, although much thicker. At full extension, the distance from the top of the crown to the base of the neck was equal to or even slightly greater than the distance from the base of the neck to the base of the legs. The legs of the bird were quite long; their color was a dull greenish yellow, but with blacker shins and some orange color on the soles of the feet.**

Describe the bird's (birds') call(s) and/or song(s), if noted: **it was silent.**



**SIMILAR SPECIES** – Juvenile Black-crowned Night-Heron is extremely similar. Luckily, there was one present at the time, and we were fortunate enough to get side-by-side comparisons for about a minute, during which both species were in the same scope view. The following differences were noted:

The Black-crowned juvenile had shorter legs; the Yellow-crowned's tarsi were approximately 25% longer and noticeably thinner. The Black-crowned had distinctly brighter legs which were more orange in color.

The Black-crowned's wing coverts lacked pale edging. They did have white spots, but these were larger and more elongate than on the YCNH, with only a single sharp point on top.

The Black-crowned's bill color was very patchy, with quite a bit of pale yellowish area in the lower mandible. The bird also had a large square greenish patch at the base of the bill, just below and in front of the eye, which contrasted noticeably with the rest of the bill. This patch was lacking on the YCNH.

The Black-crowned had a shorter neck than the YCNH. Surprisingly, the head and bill shapes of the two species were far more similar than I had anticipated. The BCNH had nearly the same sharp angles between its bill and the adjacent feathering both above and below.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species? **I have seen many Black-crowned Night-Herons and about a half-dozen Yellow-crowned Night-Herons. Prior to this I had only seen juvenile Yellow-crowned Night-Heron on one occasion, about a month earlier at Jumbo Reservoir in Logan County, where three were present.**

List books, guides, recordings, or other sources consulted and how these influenced your identification (during and after observation): **Sibley was consulted during the observation session.**

This report was made from (check one) **X** notes made during observation    notes made after observation    later from memory.

Date and time of written report: **9/27/03 8:30 PM**

Reporting observer: **Nathan Pieplow**

Signature:

Reporting observer's address: **4745-B White Rock Circle**

City: **Boulder**

State: **CO**

Zip: **80301**

Telephone: **(303) 245-8421**

email: **npieplow@indra.com**

Send report to:  
Colorado Bird Records Committee  
Tony Leukering  
PO Box 660  
Brighton, CO 80601