

A Hybrid between the Little Blue Heron and the Snowy Egret.—On January 30, 1953, the writer saw a heron along the north shore of Lake Okeechobee, Florida, which at first glance appeared to be a Little Blue (*Florida caerulea caerulea*) in the "calico" plumage between immaturity and adulthood. Subsequent observation of it for the ensuing three weeks (it remained in a small pond continually) revealed some interesting and puzzling aspects of both plumage and behavior.

Though largely white, it showed definite bluish patches here and there, but as time passed, these areas did not increase in extent as one might expect them to if the bird was actually in a process of transition from one plumage to another.

The beak and legs were certainly not typical of *F. caerulea*, nor were they characteristic of the Snowy Egret (*Leucophoyx thula*). They fit neither the one or the other but possessed characters of both.

The behavior was a striking variation from that of *F. caerulea* and was practically typical of *L. thula*. Watching it for as long as one wished for four days a week, in the same pond and at ranges of sometimes only a few yards, plumage and behavior were repeatedly checked by William Wylie, the writer's assistant on the Audubon Wildlife Tours and Louis A. Stimson of Miami, who was a visitor in Okeechobee during some of the period.

The bird's feeding tactics were marked with much activity, sudden dashes to and fro, running through shallow water, and darting here and there with the beak. In other words, exactly what a Snowy Egret would be expected to do except that in general appearance the bird resembled a Little Blue Heron.

Upon Stimson's advice, the bird was taken on February 19 and prepared as a skin by the writer. Examination in the hand only strengthened our belief that it must be a hybrid. Though having known both *F. caerulea* and *L. thula* since boyhood, the writer had never heard of hybridization occurring. The skin was therefore sent to the U. S. National Museum and an opinion requested. Reply from Mr. Allen Duvall of that institution contained the following—

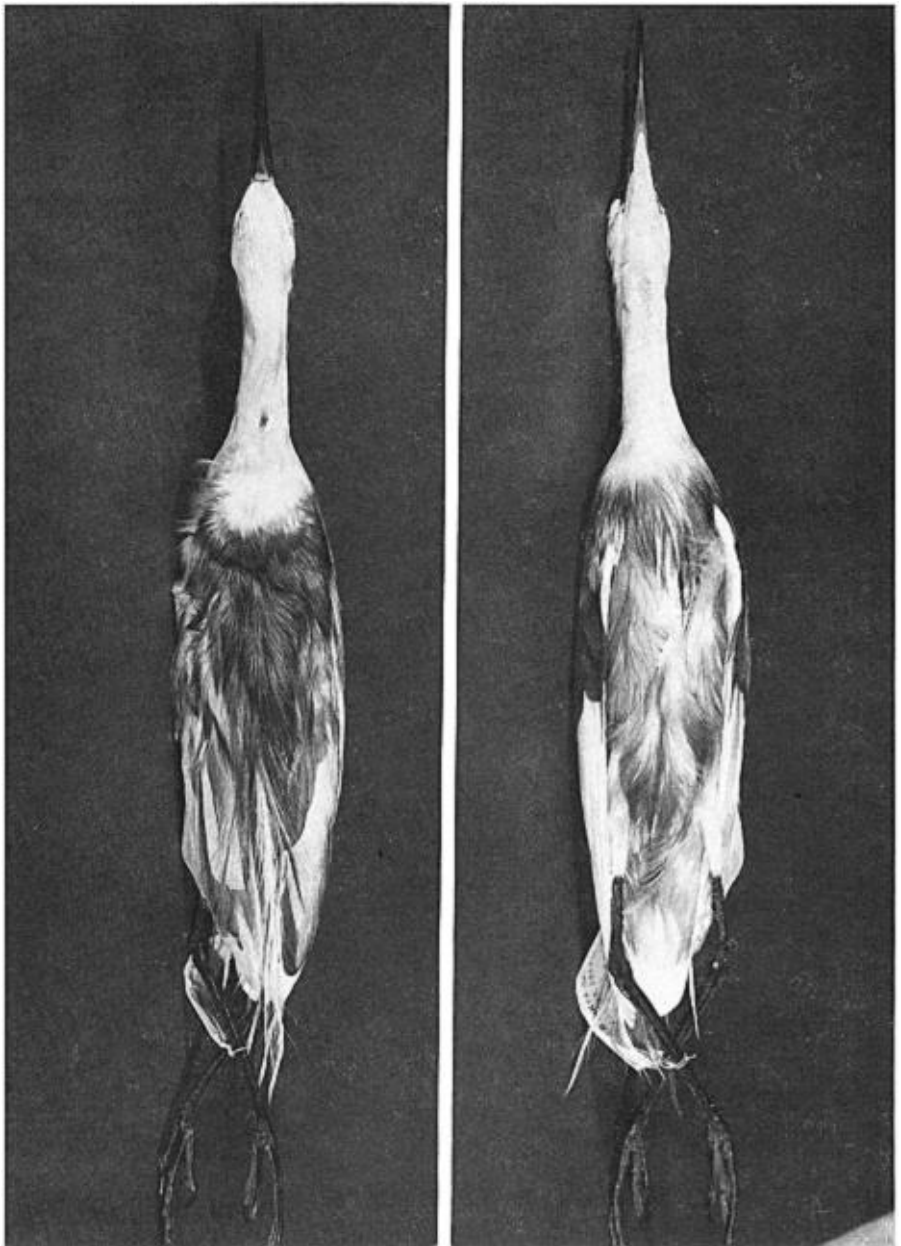
"You are right in your letter that you sent in transmitting a suspected cross between the Little Blue Heron and Snowy Egret for it was just as you surmised. All of us around the Museum examined the specimen and it is our opinion that it is a cross.

"The character which I believe is most diagnostic in indicating the markings of Snowy Egret is the presence of the long, white back plumes which have for each plume most of the structural characters of the Snowy and quite unlike those of the Little Blue."

Mr. Duvall added that he believes the writer correct in thinking this specimen to be the first known instance of such a cross, but that examination of Little Blue Herons in the pied plumage in collections might uncover more hybrids.

The accompanying photographs (plate 23) show the pattern of the plumage which is white except for bluish areas on the back, lower breast, wings, and abdomen. The dorsal plumes are straight (not recurved) and are loosely webbed. The maxilla was black, and the mandible, light blue basally and blackish distally. The lores were bluish, the eyes hazel, and the legs and feet black. The bird was a female. It measured (in inches) as follows: total length, 17.25; wing, 9.45; tail, 3.50; bill, 2.89; and tarsus, 3.62.

The exact locality where the bird was taken was a canal bank on the north shore of Lake Okeechobee, four miles west of the mouth of the Kissimmee River, off State Road 78, Glades County, Florida. The specimen was presented to the United States National Museum, and the photographs are by courtesy of that institution.—ALEXANDER SPRUNT, JR., *The Crescent, Charleston 50, South Carolina.*



SPRUNT: A hybrid between the Little Blue Heron and the Snowy Egret.