

## Reddish Egret and Herring Gull in Caribbean Colombia

by Paul K. Donahue<sup>1</sup>

On June 30, 1974 Patricia O'Brien and I observed a Reddish Egret (*Dichromanassa rufescens*) on the Isla de Salamanca, an INDERENA reserve on Colombia's Caribbean coast, about 20 miles to the west of Santa Marta. The bird was observed at fairly close range for about 30 minutes. It was of the dark phase and we surmised it was a subadult due to the generally pale and washed-out appearance of its plumage, and the mostly dark or black bill just slightly bluer near the base and lacking any sharp demarcation between light and dark areas which is typical of adults' bills. Other individuals of this species, all dark phase subadults, were observed on subsequent trips to the Isla through the month of July and up until August 19 when we left the area. A maximum of three individuals was observed on July 18. On August 7, on a trip up the Guajira Peninsula, four Reddish Egrets were seen between the town of Rio Hacha and the village of Manaure. Again these were all dark phase subadults. All of the above Reddish Egrets were seen feeding in brackish pools within one quarter mile of the Caribbean. They were occasionally in the company of other species of egrets and herons, but were more often solitary. Although attempts to photograph the egrets were made through the summer of 1974, photographs were not obtained until a return to the area in January, 1975. On January 20 Francis Gardner and I sighted one more dark phase subadult and photographed a white phase bird.

Though this is the first record of the species from Colombia these sightings are not surprising, since the species is known to occur in western coastal Venezuela, according to Meyer de Schauensee (*A Guide to the Birds of*

*South America*, Livingston Publ. Co., 1970). Furthermore they would seem to indicate that the Reddish Egret is a regular, if scarce, year-round resident along that section of the Caribbean coast.

Also on January 20, 1975, in the same pool on the Isla de Salamanca as the white phase Reddish Egret, we observed a Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) roosting with a flock of Laughing Gulls and Royal Terns. The bird was considerably larger than the Laughing Gulls. Not yet showing any grey in the mantle, the upperparts were mottled browns, becoming more streaked on the nape and head, and considerably lighter than the back. There was a well defined dark brown band on the distal half of the tail, the basal half lightly mottled. The underparts were sparsely and lightly spotted with brown. The legs were flesh-colored, the bill basally flesh-colored, distally black. We observed it from our car with a 20X scope at a distance of about 100 meters for several minutes. When we approached closer in hopes of photographing it the gull flew off down the shore with the other members of the flock, not to be seen again.

This is the first sighting of Herring Gull in Colombia that I am aware of and the only other South American record is a recovery of a banded bird from Trinidad, October 15, 1959 (French, *A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, Livingston Publ. Co., 1973). However there are a number of records, including several banding recoveries from both coasts of Panama (Wetmore, *The Birds of the Republic of Panama*, Vol. 1:442, 1965), so occurrence in Colombia was to be expected.

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