

# Sixteenth in the Fuertes series

[The original plate was printed in *Bird-Lore*, Volume XXIV, Number 5, September-October 1922, as a frontispiece facing page 253. The text, by T. Gilbert Pearson, was entitled "Herons of the World, Bulletin No. 5," of the National Association of Audubon Societies, and was printed in part on pages 306-314. (In spite of the title, it was confined to consideration of North American herons.) That text, too lengthy and too anecdotal to reprint here, presented ranges of these species at a time when plume-hunting had drastically reduced their extent. The ranges below derive from recent sources. Fuertes probably painted the plate earlier in 1922, but it is undated.]

## Reddish Egret *Egretta rufescens*

Breeds locally on Florida Keys, Tampa Bay, coastal Texas, Baja California, Guatemala, El Salvador, Cuba, the Bahamas, Bonaire, Venezuela and Colombia. Occurs occasionally at other Gulf Coast locations, and has appeared as a rare vagrant in Georgia, the Carolinas, Virginia, Kentucky, Illinois, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Nova Scotia, irregularly in Arizona and California.

Two races besides the type *rufescens* have been described, but these have not recently been subjected to evaluation.

*E. r. dickeyi*, said to be the resident race on Baja California and its islands; darker, with chocolate brown replacing rufous on head and neck.

*E. r. colorata*, from the Pacific Coast of central and southern Mexico. Larger size, shorter bill, browner head and neck.

Two distinct adult forms. (Number 1 and 2 opposite.) Dark form has rufous-chestnut head and neck, blue-gray elsewhere. Bill pink, with distal half black. Legs cobalt blue, feet dusky. Lores pale, eyes mauve, violet in breeding condition. White form, all white, primary tips grayish, with soft parts like dark form. Both appear in the same colonies, even the same broods. Whites more prevalent in Florida (up to 7%) and farther south (Colombia 34%). There are patchy intermediate plumages. Immatures are variable, shades of gray, with black soft parts, white eye. The Reddish Egret, at 30", is 7" taller than the Little Blue Heron and up to 8" taller and heavier than the Snowy Egret. Its characteristic scampering around while feeding is not invariable and not exclusive to it, and so is not a definitive "field mark."

## Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*

Breeding range is eastern coast of the Gulf of California, shores of the Gulf of Mexico, southern Mississippi basin, and the East Coast of the United States north to Connecticut. Also south through Central America and the West Indies to Uruguay and Peru, but breeding unconfirmed in extensive South American areas. Northern populations migratory. Vagrant non-breeding or post-breeding wanderers north at least to British Columbia, Saskatchewan, southern Labrador.

Officially monotypic, although a South American race *caerulescens* has been described.

The adult (Number 5), is a medium-sized heron, 25-29" tall, uniformly blue-gray, with a purplish-red head, neck, and upper breast. Rather stout bill pale blue, lores dull green, iris pale yellow. Legs and feet blue or gray-green. Slightly larger than the (eastern) Snowy Egret. In breeding condition, lores are marine blue, bill and legs blacker. Smaller than the Reddish Egret, bill less needle-like than Snowy, generally heavier-looking and slower moving than either.

The immature (Number 3) is all white, with dark wing tips, soft parts same as non-breeding adult but legs paler and more greenish. This plumage lasts well into first year, gradually molts into the mottled transition plumage (Number 4), white with shades of blue-gray on head, neck and back giving a patchy or "piebald" look. It is succeeded in second year with plumage approaching adult.

## Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*

Widespread in the New World, with breeding distribution patchy. On the East Coast Florida to Maine, in mid-continent, Gulf Coast and lower Mississippi River drainage, Oklahoma, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and on the West Coast to Northern California. Also through Central and South America. Post-breeding wanderings may bring it north to Alaska, Alberta, British Columbia, Newfoundland. Winters from mid-latitude states southward.

Two races. *E. t. thula*, the eastern and most widespread, occupies the entire range except for the western United States from west Texas north to Idaho and the West Coast, south through Baja California, where it is replaced by *E. t. brewsteri*, whose range is not clearly defined.

Adult (Number 6) is smaller (22-26") and daintier than the other two white egrets shown. The adult has all-white plumage with crown and back plumes recurved and lacy in breeding condition, an all-black, more stiletto-like bill, with yellow lores, reddish in breeding season, black legs, yellow feet. Immatures have pale yellow bills and feet, the legs greenish with yellow "seams" down the back. *E. t. brewsteri* is larger, with longer, heavier legs. Size differences between *brewsteri* and similar species probably not as useful as for *thula*. A very active feeder.

—Robert Arbib



Louis Agassiz Puertés.