

Eighteenth in the Fuertes print series

[The painting opposite was published in *Bird-Lore*, Volume XXV, Number 1, January-February, 1923. It was accompanied by a text by T. Gilbert Pearson, which has been substantially revised and updated herewith, especially in reference to modern taxonomic thought and to distribution. The painting, rendered in water colors measures $14\frac{1}{2} \times 9\frac{1}{4}$ "; its size in *Bird-Lore* was reduced to $6\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$ ". It was part of a series entitled Herons of the United States. This is our fourth and final heron plate, in which all of the species on the U.S. list except Cattle Egret have been pictured. The Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*, has been recorded in Canada.]

Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*)

DESCRIPTION.—This is our most widespread large white heron. Every feather on its body is white (No. 1). The average specimen measures 41 inches from bill-tip to tail-tip. It is thus much larger than the white-phase Reddish Egret at 30 inches, the white immature Little Blue Heron, at 25-29 inches, the Snowy Egret at 22-26 inches, and the Cattle Egret at 20 inches. The combination of stout yellow bill and long black legs is unique among our herons, and the slower, "heavier" movements of this egret aid in identification. In nuptial plumage, about 50 plumes about 16 inches in length, grow from the upper back. These are gradually shed as the season progresses.

RANGE.—A virtually cosmopolitan species; through eastern Europe, across Asia to Japan, south to India and Australia. In the Americas from southern Canada southward to the Straits of Magellan. Centers of breeding distribution are the eastern seaboard of the United States, the Mississippi Basin and Midwest, and the Rocky Mountain foothills north to Oregon. Post-breeding dispersal carries many individuals northward, a few of which linger well into December. Four races have been described, of which ours is *C.a. egretta*.

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

DESCRIPTION.—The Great Blue Heron (No. 4) is one of the largest herons in North America, and is undoubtedly known to more people than any other representative of the Family Ardeidae. While its coat contains many colors the general tone of the plumage, especially at a little distance, is slaty blue, hence the name 'Blue Crane', by which it is known in many parts of the country. Individuals vary much in size but the length usually ranges between 38 and 50 inches. When the wings are fully extended the distance across them from tip to tip is nearly 6 feet. The extraordinary long legs and neck, together with its large size, cause the bird to attract universal attention wherever seen.

RANGE.—Great Blue Herons are distributed over most of the North American continent. Eight races are recognized. The nominate race breeds from Alaska south to Washington east through central Manitoba and northern Ontario to Nova

Scotia and Prince Edward Island and southward down through the Gulf of Mexico and lower California. In winter it seeks suitable habitat from southern New England and the Middle states south to the West Indies, Panama, and Venezuela.

The "Great White Heron" (No. 2) is the largest of North American herons, with much size variation. Ridgway states that they range from 45 to 54 inches bill to tail. Audubon wrote that while young the white plumage has a creamy tinge, but the adult birds are pure white. They do not bear the delicate aigrette plumes, but in breeding condition have a group of elongated feathers pendant from the upper breast. This is the rarest of our breeding herons. It seems to be confined largely to southern Florida, especially the Keys, and there is apparently a dimorphic population farther south in the West Indies.

There is still some uncertainty about the taxonomy of this heron. To some, the Great White is merely a color morph of the Great Blue, and thus both the names Great White and *Ardea occidentalis* must be dropped. Others consider it a valid race of the Great Blue, which would make it *A.h. occidentalis*. They cite its distinct behavior, habitat preference, and morphology. As for Wurdemann's Heron (No. 3) formerly considered a race, *A.h. wurdemanni*, of the Great Blue, it now seems more likely that it is merely a very variable color morph of the Great Blue, Florida race *A.h. wardi*. But it may be a "hybrid" between the *occidentalis* species, race, or form, and the local Great Blue. It is very rare and confined to extreme southern Florida and the Florida Keys. This white-headed, blue-bodied form suggests a Great Blue Heron with a white upper neck and head and it lacks the black plumes of the nominate race. Other races of the Great Blue Heron include *A.h. hyperonca* and *A.h. fannini* which replace the nominate race along the Pacific coast with the darker, slightly longer-winged *fannini* breeding from Washington north to the Alaskan peninsula and *hyperonca* from Oregon south to south of the Mexican border. *A.h. sanctilucae* breeds in Baja California. In the Galapagos Islands is found another apparently valid race, *A.h. cognata*. Inland along the Sierra Nevada, south through the southwestern states to Texas and the Gulf Coast, *hyperonca* is replaced by *A.h. treganzai*. Eastward, the pale *A.h. wardi* ranges from Oklahoma and Kansas across the Mississippi Basin to Georgia and south to Florida and the Gulf Coast.

