

First record of juvenal "white-phase" Great Blue Heron in Texas

Eric N. McHenry and John C. Dyes

ON JUNE 11, 1978, while participating in the annual Colonial Waterbird Survey in Galveston Bay, Galveston County Texas the authors discovered a Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) nest containing three fully feathered fledglings. Two were normally colored and one was pure white.

The nest site was on the Pelican Island cutoff, a small (38 hectares) island isolated from the main part of Pelican Island by the Intracostal Waterway. The nest was located in a small heronry. Several species of wading birds were nesting in low shrubs and trees ranging 1-3 m in height. The heronry comprised several Great Blue Heron nests with young. Although several adults were in the vicinity, we did not observe any attending the nest with the white fledgling. All adults observed were dark-plumaged.

The nest and young were first observed by McHenry and the white fledgling was subsequently photographed (Fig. 1) by Dyes. It was almost as large as an adult Great Blue Heron, as were the two dark-plumaged young herons in the same nest. Although its plumage was pure white it was not a true albino since it had a yellow iris, black maxilla with a large irregular whitish spot between the eye and the nostril, yellow mandible, and gray tarsi. We believe this observation constitutes the first record of a fledgling white-phase Great Blue Heron in Texas.

The "Great White" Heron (*Ardea herodias occidentalis*) a color morph of

the Great Blue Heron, breeds and is the predominant race in the Florida Keys (Mayr 1956, *Auk* 73:71-77; Meyerriecks 1957, *Auk* 74:469-478). Breeding pairs consisting of one dark bird and one white bird have been observed in Florida and some such pairings have produced both white and dark young (Mayr *op. cit.*; Meyerriecks *op. cit.*; Bancroft 1969: *Auk* 86:141-142). Meyer-



Juvenal Great Blue (white-phase) Heron, Pelican Island cutoff, Galveston Bay, Texas, June 11, 1978. Photo/John C. Dyes.

riecks (*op. cit.*) also reported one nest in the Keys which contained both white and blue young and for which he was "almost positive" that both parents were white. On the other hand, we observed no adult "Great White" Herons at the Texas heronry where we found the white fledgling.

The "Great White" Heron is a casual visitor to the Texas coast, mainly in winter (Oberholser 1974, *Bird Life of Texas*, University of Texas Press, Austin); however, no previous Texas records exist of either nesting adults or of white young in nests. The young white heron which we saw and photographed had all the plumage characteristics of a juvenal "Great White" Heron (Oberholser *op. cit.*). It is an intriguing possibility that some of the "wandering" "Great White" Herons recorded in Texas may have been native Texas birds, possibly fledged by dark-plumaged parents. If so the "racial" status of *occidentalis* would seem to be open to question.

—3320 Ash Drive,
Dickinson, Texas 77539
(McHenry) 1000 Shady Oak
Drive, Dickinson, Texas
77539 (Dyes).



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