

GRAY HERONS ON BARBADOS

Has this species been overlooked on the East coast?

by P. William Smith and Susan A. Smith

THE GRAY HERON (*ARDEA CINEREA*) is the widespread Old-World counterpart of our Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*). It has a history of trans-Atlantic displacement, both to Greenland, where it is considered casual (Palmer 1962, A.O.U. 1983), and to the southern Caribbean, where birds banded as nestlings in France have been recovered on Montserrat, Martinique, and Trinidad (Cramp and Simmons 1977). On November 8, 1988, we observed two Gray Herons in the Graeme Hall Swamp, Barbados (13°10'N, 59°35'W), where this species was sighted in August 1963 (Bond 1965) and where two other Old-World herons, the Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) (Bond 1966) and the Western Reef-Heron (*Egretta gulariis*) (Smith and Hutt 1984), have been discovered.

S. A. Smith noted the first Gray Heron at about 7 a.m., perched atop a mangrove about 150 m distant. It was evidently an adult, showing a medium-gray mantle and nearly white hindneck, a white head with a prominent black stripe behind the eye, largely white underparts except for black on the sides of the lower belly, black shoulders, white thighs, a bright yellow bill, and dark brownish legs. The second individual flew

in beside it shortly thereafter. It was duller, suggesting that it might be immature. By 7:15 a.m., both individuals had secreted themselves in the foliage and were no longer visible. In the same period and from the same vantage point, we also saw several Great Blue Herons come in to roost. The Great Blues were larger and much darker overall, especially on the neck and foreparts, and showed chestnut thighs. We considered whether we might have seen White-necked Herons (*Ardea cocoi*), which are native to South America, but discounted this possibility because the birds clearly did not have black caps. Notified of our discovery, local ornithologist M. B. Hutt (*in litt.*) reported finding three Gray Herons at the same site on the following day.

With a windborne invasion of African locusts in the southern Caribbean making world headlines during the autumn of 1988, it was not surprising to discover an Old-World bird species on Barbados, especially one like the Gray Heron, which has reached there before. It seems possible that this species has been overlooked on the East Coast of North America in the past. The species has wandered to the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands, and has even

been found near Bermuda (Cramp and Simmons 1977). From 1979 through 1985, 279 Gray Herons were recorded in Iceland, 50 in 1985 alone, many of which overwintered (Pétursson and Olafsson 1988). Thus, the Gray Heron seems likely to appear sooner or later in the Maritime Provinces of Canada or in the eastern United States. We urge birders to watch for it, but we wish to emphasize that this note is intended only to alert readers to the possibility of the Gray Heron's occurrence. Age and seasonal variation in both Gray and Great Blue herons often makes it difficult to be certain of the identity of particular individuals in the field, and the accompanying photos are intended only as a starting point. We know of no good treatise on the fine points of separating these two species and hope that this note will stimulate further investigation. ■

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