

First Record of Striated Heron (*Butorides striata*) for the Greater Antilles at St. John, United States Virgin Islands

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Abstract

An adult Striated Heron (*Butorides striata*) was found and photographed at Concordia, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, on 25 May and was last seen on 29 May 2003. Its neck color was compared in the field with a color print of Payne's voucher specimens used as a hybrid index and scored as 2 on a scale of 1-9, well within the range of variation for Striated Heron (1-4) and beyond the range of variation for Green Heron (*B. virescens*; 5-9). This record represents the first for the Virgin Islands and Greater Antilles, the second for the West Indies, and the northernmost for the species.

Introduction

The nominate subspecies of Striated Heron (*Butorides s. striata*) resides in continental South America and hybridizes with the nominate subspecies of Green Heron (*Butorides v. virescens*) where their ranges meet in southern Central America and on several southern Caribbean islands (Payne 1974, Voous 1986, Hayes 2002, 2006). Although not known to be migratory, it has strayed across short stretches of ocean to the islands of Cocos (Slud 1967), Bonaire (Voous 1986), and Tobago (Payne 1974, Hayes 2006), and has wandered as far north as Costa Rica in Central America (Stiles and Skutch 1989) and St. Vincent in the Lesser Antilles (Bond 1964, Payne 1974). The latter record, represented by an adult specimen taken on 18 July 1924 (American Museum of Natural History 325328), is the only previous record of the species for the West Indies. Here we document a Striated Heron in the Virgin Islands.

Field encounter

At 11:45 a.m. on 25 May 2003, we found a gray-necked *Butorides* heron in a freshwater pond at Concordia, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands. We observed the bird foraging from a distance of 40 m until it flew away at 12:12 p.m. Recognizing it immediately as a Striated

Heron, we obtained a series of digiscoped photographs through a 25× spotting scope (Figures 1, 2). Although there was a slight tinge of rufous on the cheeks, the sides of the neck were solid gray with a slight brown wash, and the hindneck was solid pale gray, paler than the back. A rufous-bordered white line extended down the foreneck. There were long plumes on the back. There appeared to be a few white spots on the wing when the bird flew away.

The heron was subsequently observed by Laurel Brannick Trager on 28 May and by Rick Falkenberg on 29 May; on the latter occasion, it was twice chased away by a Green Heron. Subsequent attempts to relocate it at the same pond or in other wetlands of the island were unsuccessful.

Identification

The solid neck coloration and long back plumes, combined with possible white spotting on the wing coverts, indicate it was an adult or subadult that had acquired definitive adult neck coloration (Davis and Kushlan 1994, Hayes 2002). The distinctly gray sides and rear of the neck (Figures 1, 2) distinguished it from the locally breeding Green Heron, which has a rufous neck (Hayes 2002). The slight tinges of rufous on its face (Figures 1, 2) and the rufous lines on the foreneck are normal for a Striated Heron (Hayes 2002). The neck color of the bird was compared directly in the field with a color print of Payne's (1974) voucher specimens used as a hybrid index between *B. virescens* and *B. striata* and scored as a 2 on a scale of 1-9, well within the range of variation for Striated Heron (1-4) and beyond the range of variation for Green Heron (5-9; see Hayes 2002). By contrast, neck-color scores of Green Herons observed by us throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands from September 2002 through July 2003, based on the first observation or highest count of birds seen at

localities >1 km apart, averaged 7.1 (SD = 0.6, range = 6-9, n = 35). Neck-color scores of Green Heron specimens averaged 7.7 (SD = 0.9, range = 7-9, n = 43) in the Greater Antilles and 7.0 (SD = 0.5, range = 6-8, n = 31) in the Lesser Antilles (Payne 1974). The Striated Heron specimen from St. Vincent had a neck-color score of 3 (Payne 1974; Hayes, unpubl. photograph of specimen).

The low neck-color score strongly suggests it was neither a hybrid from southern Central America, the southern Caribbean, and northern South America—where intermediate birds with a neck-color score of 5 occur (Payne 1974, Hayes 2002, 2006)—nor an individual of the paler Bahamian subspecies (*B. s. bahamensis*), in which a few have a neck-color score of 5 (Payne 1974). Because no similarly gray-necked *Butorides* have been collected or reported in North America (Payne 1974), we believe this bird was a Striated Heron rather than an aberrantly pigmented Green Heron.

Discussion

This record represents the first of the species for the Virgin Islands and Greater Antilles (the Virgin Islands are located on the eastern bank of the Greater Antilles), only the second for the West Indies, and the northernmost record in the New World. Natural vagrancy may have been overlooked in the past and should be expected to occur elsewhere in the West Indies. Birders should be aware of the differences between Green and Striated Herons (Hayes 2002) and should be alert for the latter in the Caribbean and perhaps even southern North America.

Acknowledgments

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Figures 1, 2. Adult Striated Heron (*Butorides virescens*) at Concordia, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, on 25 May 2003. Photographs by Floyd E. Hayes.

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