

2000 - 13

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

REDDISH EGRET
Egretta rufescens

Red 2/2/01 wpl
7-0 (A)

Location: Lake Cheraw; Cheraw, Otero County, Colorado

Date: September 3, 10 and 17, 2000

I found this bird while birding alone on September 3rd. I also saw it on the 10th and 17th. It was seen by many other birders, including a fairly large group on the CFO field trip that I led that included this site on September 17th.

Lake Cheraw is a large plains reservoir without much shorebird habitat. As far as I know, the Reddish Egret was only seen on the north side of Lake Cheraw. This was only visible from the south shore of the reservoir, which is a distance of probably 1/2 mile. Therefore, the ID of this individual depended much on behavior and comparison to nearby Great Blue Heron. I observed it with my Kowa 20-60X scope. Light conditions varied but viewing conditions were excellent at times. I saw the bird feeding and at rest; never in flight.

Description:

What first drew my attention to this bird was its manner of feeding. It canopy fed, spreading the wings and walking "drunkenly" to and fro. This herky-jerky, unpredictable and staggering feeding style was quite typical of this bird on all days it was observed. I believe that it was a juvenile, as at the distance that I observed it, it was uniform dull gray with a vaguely more reddish neck and head. The bill was either all dark, or at least not strongly bi-colored. The legs were dark. It lacked plumes.

Similar Species:

The Great Blue Heron is much larger, has a white and black pattern on the head and neck, yellow on the bill and dark flight feathers show in flight. This bird was plainer colored, and distinctly smaller and shorter-legged than adjacent Great Blues. The Tricolored Heron has yellow legs and bill, and a white foreneck and undersides. The non-breeding Little Blue Heron is most similar to this bird. The Little Blue Heron has a purplish, not pinkish wash on the head and neck, a distinctly darker tipped bill, greenish-grey legs, proportionately shorter legs (especially the upper leg), and lacks the "dancing" feeding behavior. I believe that the leg proportions of Reddish Egret are different than either Little Blue or Tricolored. Reddish Egret has proportionately longer legs with a longer distance between the body and the first joint ("knee"... but actually "ankle"). This bird had the longer legs of a Reddish Egret.

Experience with Species:

I have seen all mentioned herons, including Reddish Egret in Colorado, California in 1993 and south Texas in March 1994.

This report is prepared from notes made during observation.

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