

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Nebraska Bird Review

Nebraska Ornithologists' Union

3-2001

First Record of a Reddish Egret for Nebraska

Stephen J. Dinsmore

Iowa State University, cootjr@iastate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebbirdrev>



Part of the [Poultry or Avian Science Commons](#), and the [Zoology Commons](#)

Dinsmore, Stephen J., "First Record of a Reddish Egret for Nebraska" (2001). *Nebraska Bird Review*. 298.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebbirdrev/298>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Nebraska Bird Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

First record of a Reddish Egret for Nebraska

Stephen J. Dinsmore

Stephen J. Dinsmore
Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
Box 9690/257 Thompson Hall
Mississippi State, MS 39762

On 27 September 2000, I was birding the west end of Lake McConaughy from Marina Landing. At 2:15 p.m. I noticed a few egrets farther east off Cedar Vue. By 2:30 p.m. I had arrived at Cedar Vue and began looking over the egrets. The egrets were loosely scattered in a small area with numerous Great Blue Herons, approximately 400m from the north shore of the lake. There were six egrets present--4 Great Egrets, 1 Snowy Egret, and an intermediate-sized bird that I identified as a white morph Reddish Egret. The Reddish Egret foraged for about half an hour and then flew to some snags in the middle of the mudflat and was sleeping by 3:30 p.m. I returned at 5:15 p.m. and found the bird actively foraging with the Snowy Egret within 200m of the north shore. By 6 p.m., the bird had returned to its roost in the middle of the mudflat and was asleep when I left the area at 6:08 p.m.

During the initial observation period, the bird was often in the company of Snowy and Great egrets, allowing for direct comparisons to both species. The bird was noticeably larger than a Snowy Egret and only slightly smaller than a Great Egret under direct comparisons to both species. The plumage was entirely white with no dark mottling or dusky wingtips. There were a few scraggly plumes along the sides of the neck, but these were not as extensive as those of an adult Reddish Egret. The bill was long, dagger-shaped, and in good light appeared light gray with the distal 5% black. The bill was essentially a large replica of a Snowy Egret's bill, and was noticeably thinner (especially at the base) than a Great Egret. I estimated that the bill was at least 90% of the length of a Great Egret's bill. At times, the facial skin appeared to be pale (probably pink), but I could not adequately discern the specific color because of the distance and lighting. The eye was yellow with a black iris. The legs were a very dark gray/black color with no yellow color on the legs or feet. Although the bird appeared white when perched, I thought it showed a pale gray cast (especially on the wings) in flight, but this could have been due to backlighting. The bird's behavior was very distinctive and typical of a Reddish Egret. When feeding, the bird began with a low, crouched trot that gradually became a run. At the end of the run, the bird would raise its neck, spread one or both wings, take a few erratic steps, and then jab at something in the water. This process was repeated continuously, and the bird covered a lot of ground when feeding. The low crouched trot that precedes the open-wing foraging behavior is very typical of Reddish

Egrets, and I have never seen this behavior emulated by any other wader. On the basis of bill color and plumage, I concluded the bird was an immature white morph Reddish Egret. While the exact age of the bird is speculative, the combination of bill pattern, pale lores, leg color, and scraggly plumages at the base of the neck may be indicative of a second-year Reddish Egret (R. Paul, pers. comm., Paul 1996).

The Reddish Egret remained in this area through at least 15 October and was seen by several birders. This is the first record of a Reddish Egret for Nebraska. Reddish Egrets are the rarest of the North American herons (Paul 1996). The U. S. breeding population is thought to number about 2,000 pairs; about 1,500 pairs breed in Texas (Paul 1991). Reddish Egrets are exceedingly rare vagrants northward to the Great Plains with published records from Oklahoma (3), Kansas (2), and Colorado (5). Most records are from the post-breeding period (July-September), but there are also a few spring records in May. To date, all previous records have been of dark morph birds, mostly immatures. White morph birds comprise about 5-12% of the Gulf Coast population in Texas (Hancock and Kushlan 1984), so they would be expected to occur inland much less frequently than dark morph individuals. Identification problems with white morph birds may also contribute to the paucity of interior records: unless a white morph Reddish Egret was seen at close range or actively foraging, it could easily be passed off as some other species, most likely a Snowy Egret. I thank Richard T. Paul of the National Audubon Society for helping with the ageing of white morph Reddish Egrets.

Literature Cited

- Hancock, J., and J. Kushlan. 1984. *The Herons Handbook*. Croom Helm, London, England.
- Paul, R. T. 1991. Status report - *Egretta rufescens* (Gmelin) Reddish Egret. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Houston, Texas. 73 pp.
- Paul, R. T. 1996. Reddish Egret. Pages 281-294 in Rodgers, J. A., H. W. Kale II, and H. T. Smith. 1996. *Rare and endangered biota of Florida. Volume V. Birds*. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.