

BULLETIN
OF THE
NUTTALL ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB.

VOL. VII.

JANUARY, 1882.

No. 1.

ON AN APPARENTLY NEW HERON FROM
FLORIDA.

BY ROBERT RIDGWAY.

The following facts in relation to an apparently hitherto unnoticed large Heron found in Southwestern Florida, I am kindly permitted to lay before the readers of the Nuttall Bulletin, by Mr. Charles W. Ward, of Pontiac, Michigan, who spent several weeks at the breeding grounds of the bird in question, and was thus enabled to make many very interesting observations on its habits, etc. Mr. Ward's memoranda are especially interesting in connection with the question of *Ardea occidentalis* Aud. and *A. wurdemanni* Baird, but unfortunately the matter, in the light of the evidence which he adduces, becomes involved in greater obscurity than before.

Under date of September 3 (1881), Mr. Ward writes as follows:—

“My observations of the Herons during the past season do not correspond with those of Mr. N. B. Moore, as recorded on page 232 of your article*, in regard to their feeding habits. I found them generally living in communities, roosting, nesting, and feeding together, like Pigeons, and often observed flocks of the Little White, Reddish, and other Egrets, feeding together

* Cf. Bull. U. S. Geol. Geogr. Survey Terr. Vol. IV, No. 1, pp. 231, 232.

like Teal Ducks. Two specimens of *A. occidentalis* were seen feeding quietly within twenty feet of one of the Herons procured by me [*A. wardi*, nobis]. They were feeding on a mud bar at low tide. I was once concealed in the low brush near a small pool watching three Louisiana Egrets chasing minnows, when two of them making for the same minnow squared off for a knock-down, while the third coolly appropriated the prize, leaving the combatants situated like complainant and defendant at the close of a law suit. In all my observations of the Herons I have seen nothing to lead to a conclusion that one of these birds held any particular antipathy against its own species while feeding. In the many squabbles between Herons on their feeding grounds the encounters occurred quite as often between different species as members of the same species. It may be that during the breeding season they are more friendly than at other times. In order that you may understand my opportunities for observing these birds, I enclose a rough map of Mound Key and surroundings, my camping place from January 20 till April 10. As you will see by the figures marked . . . it was in the midst of their feeding grounds, these places being mud- and sand-bars, bare at low tide. Regarding the Reddish Egret, among many thousands of them I saw only one in the pure white plumage, and no white young; but one of my dark specimens has white feathers on the head and in the tail, while one of the secondary quills has the outer web chiefly white. My companion of last winter's Florida trip reports that he saw no Reddish Egrets with white except on the secondaries.

“Regarding the large Herons [*i.e.*, *A. wardi*], I am much inclined to think them a geographical variety. . . . the specimens being very uniform in color. . . . I examined some thirty nests at least, fifteen of which contained young, all being dark colored, *with one exception*. These birds are common in South-western Florida, and their nests are frequently found along the coast. From all the information at my command, connected with my own observations, I am almost convinced that the bird in question is separate and distinct from *A. occidentalis* and *A. würdemanni*, and the fact that Audubon found the former in immense numbers among the mangrove islands of Eastern Florida is strong evidence that he happened in the vicinity of one of their rookeries. As you will observe by examining the diagram

of my camping place and noting the rookeries of large Herons these birds were quite common in that vicinity, while I saw only a few specimens of *A. occidentalis*. The white bird found in the nest with the blue might have come there from an adjoining empty nest, some 30 or 40 feet distant, as it could easily have done, being nearly full-grown. This surmise is strengthened by the circumstance that I saw a large white Heron on the island marked '*', and my companion killed a similar, if not the same, specimen on the large island marked '2,' which he threw away, supposing it to be a common White Egret [*Herodias egretta*]. These I now believe to have been *A. occidentalis*; the other [*H. egretta*] was then laying its eggs, while the description of *A. occidentalis* corresponds to my recollection of the bird he killed. At the time, I was not familiar with the description of *A. occidentalis*.

"In the Little Blue Heron [*Florida carulea*] and Reddish Egret (*Dichromanassa rufa*), where dichromatism appears to be an established fact, each species presents different phases and mixtures of both colors, especially the Little Blue, which shows almost every variety of curious markings of blue and white; while in the Reddish Egret, one specimen shows white on the head, tail, and wings, and others reported by Mr. Adams show white on the wings.

"As before said, I believe the bird to be a geographical variation of *A. herodias*, residing permanently and breeding in South Florida. I think that further search and observation will develop more evidence concerning *A. occidentalis* and *A. würdemanni*, which may result in confirming your theory of their being one and the same species. You will pardon my opposing your opinion, but my convictions are so strong that only the finding of white birds with blue young and more cases of blue parents with white young, or adults showing mixtures of both phases, would overcome them."

Assuming that the large white birds observed by Mr. Ward were really a white phase of the dark-colored birds obtained by him, and which were so numerous in the locality, it certainly appears strange that so few of the former were seen. The case of the Reddish Egret, which he cites, affords, however, an exact parallel, and it is now considered established beyond question that "Peale's Egret" (*Ardea pealei* Bonap. — a pure white bird)

is merely a white phase of this species. As to the comparative rarity of these large white birds, in the locality where observed by Mr. Ward, militating against any theory of their specific identity with the dark-colored birds, it should be remembered that in the case of nearly every dichromatic species of bird this condition is more or less variable with locality. A pertinent example may be cited in the case of *Demiigretta sacra*, a Heron of wide distribution in the Far East. This species inhabits a considerable number of islands in the Polynesian group, and it has been noticed and recorded by naturalists who have visited that region, that on some islands all or nearly all the birds of this species are dark-colored, on others all or nearly all are white, while on others still there may be a more equal proportion of the two phases. It may be remarked that the two phases in this species are even more distinct in coloration than in the case of *Dichromanassa rufa*, the colored phase being darker than in the latter species. Upon the whole, even admitting the possibility of the white young bird seen by Mr. Ward having of its own volition taken up its abode in a nest containing dark colored young, I am strongly inclined to believe that it belonged to the same species with the latter, the question of its parentage (*i.e.*, whether its parents were white or dark-colored birds) being a comparatively unimportant consideration, as affecting the main question. But in adopting the view of their specific identity a problem arises which in the light of our present knowledge appears unsolvable, and which may be briefly stated thus:—

The large "blue" Herons obtained by Mr. Ward are, in every respect as regards size and proportions, identical with *Ardea occidentalis* Aud. and *A. würdemanni* Baird; in coloration they agree exactly with the latter, except only in the pattern of the head and tint of the neck, which are precisely as in *A. herodias*. The bird in question is apparently "dichromatic," having a white phase; hence, assuming that *A. occidentalis* and *A. würdemanni* are dichromatic phases of one species, it necessarily follows that white individuals of the bird in question would be *absolutely indistinguishable from white examples of A. occidentalis!* Still, in view of the fact that the colored phase differs from *A. würdemanni* in its most essential feature of coloration, *i.e.*, the pattern of the head markings, it seems impossible to unite them, unless it can be shown that the type of *A. würdemanni* does not represent

the perfect colored phase of that species.* There are hence several hypotheses which might be plausibly argued upon theoretical grounds, and which may be stated as follows: (1) That *A. occidentalis*, *A. würdemanni*, *A. wardi*, and *A. herodias* all belong to a single species, which reaches its extremes of variation in the first- and last-named; (2) That these names include three distinct races or species: *A. herodias*, which is never white; *A. occidentalis*, which is dichromatic (having separate white and colored phases), and *A. wardi*, also dichromatic, its white phase indistinguishable from that of *A. occidentalis*, and its colored phase distinguishable from that of the same species (*A. würdemanni*) by the different pattern and color of the head and neck alone; and (3) that there are two species, *A. occidentalis* and *A. herodias*, which in Florida hybridize on an extensive scale, producing the intermediate specimens which have been distinguished as *A. würdemanni* and *A. wardi*.

Of these hypotheses I have, after careful consideration of them all, concluded to adopt the second as being most consistent with known facts, and accordingly propose for the bird in question the name

486 * *Ardea wardi* Ridgw.

WARD'S HERON.

With the following characters: —

CH. — Colored phase exactly like *A. würdemanni* (= dark phase of *A. occidentalis* ?), but with the head colored as in *A. herodias*. Differing from *herodias* in much larger size (culmen 6.50–7.00 inches, tarsus, 8.50–9.00 inches), lighter general coloration, and (in dried skin) light brown instead of black legs. Dichromatic; the white phase being indistinguishable from that of *A. occidentalis* (?).

Adult ♂ (No. 82,329, U. S. Nat. Mus., Oyster Bay, Florida, March, 1881; Chas. W. Ward): Head white, with the sides of the crown and entire occiput (including the lengthened plumes) deep black; † neck lavender-gray (much lighter than in the type of *würdemanni*), the fore-neck

* After many careful examinations of the type specimen, I am led to the conclusion that it does represent the perfect colored phase, since no combination, or division, of the markings of *A. herodias* and *A. occidentalis*—or, in other words, no partial development of the head-pattern of the former—would give the peculiar markings which distinguish *A. würdemanni*.

† The pattern of coloration of the head exactly as in *A. herodias*, and not at all like *A. würdemanni*.

white thickly streaked with black for the lower two-thirds; jugular plumage chiefly white, their lengthened tapering portion entirely so. Upper surface uniform bluish plumbeous, the lengthened scapular plumes however whitish or pale silvery gray. Upper breast uniform black; abdomen and lower breast white, rather indistinctly streaked with dark gray; anterior region mixed black and white, in longitudinal dashes (the black rather predominating); crissum immaculate pure white. Tibiæ uniform light cinnamon; edge of the wing (especially near the bend) deeper cinnamon but this much mixed with white toward the bases of the quills; lining the wing, axillars, sides, and flanks, uniform plumbeous. Bill, apparently, entirely olivaceous-yellow; naked portion of tibiæ very pale brown (evidently yellowish or flesh-colored in life); tarsi light brown (olivaceous in life?), darker in front; toes light brown. Wing, 20.50: culmen, 6.75: depth of bill through nostril, 1.10; tarsus, 8.75; middle toe, 5.10; naked portion of tibiæ, 5.50.

Mr. W. H. Collins, of Detroit, who kindly presented the specimen described above to the National Museum, has sent me measurements of two other specimens, one in his own possession and the other mounted for Mr. Ward. As may be seen below they agree closely in dimensions with the type, their measurements being, respectively, wing 20.00-20.50; culmen 6.50-7.00; depth of bill through nostril, 1.25; tarsus, 8.75-9.00; middle toe, 5.25-5.45; naked portion of tibia, 5.75-6.00.

LIST OF BIRDS OBSERVED AT HOUSTON, HARRIS CO., TEXAS AND VICINITY AND IN THE COUNTIES MONTGOMERY, GALVESTON AND FORD BEND.

BY H. NEHRLING.

1. *Turdus migratorius*, L. ROBIN.—Very common in the woods from November to April. Very shy and retiring during their stay; only a few have been observed in the larger gardens of Houston. Feeds abundantly on the berries of the holly (*Ilex opaca*) and the myrtle-holly (*Oreophila myrtifolia*). About the 15th of April all have departed for the North.
2. *Turdus mustelinus*, Gmel. WOOD THRUSH.—Arrives from the North early in October when the aromatic berries of the *Magnolia grandiflora* are ripe, on which they eagerly feed. On account of this food the flesh is very delicate and large numbers are killed by pot hunters, who call them "Grassets." In the winter months they appear not to be common and inhabit swampy thickets and bottom woods.