

# First sight record of Western Reef-Herons for Barbados

*Are we about to see another transatlantic colonization?*

*P. William Smith and Maurice B. Hutt*

ON FEBRUARY 20, 1984, while on vacation in Barbados, Smith and Susan A. Dolder found two Western Reef-Herons (*Egretta gularis*) in the Graeme Hall Swamp, Christ Church Parish (13°10'N, 59°35'W). This brackish swamp of about 32 hectares is one of only a few permanent wet areas on the island.

The initial observers were standing on the south shore of the swamp's west pool looking northward at the island's only heronry, about 150 meters distant. Here, 600-800 pairs of Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) nest in a mixture of mangroves, primarily the White Mangrove (*Laguncularia racemosa*). Suddenly a nearby disturbance caused a general disruption and milling about of many of the birds in the area. When they settled down, two medium-sized, bluish herons were clearly visible perched on exposed mangrove roots across the pool. Both were Western Reef-Herons. One was in full breeding dress, with slaty blue plumage; white chin, throat, and upper foreneck; dark greenish-black legs with bright greenish-

yellow feet; a stoutish, mainly horn-colored bill; and at least two long aigrettes trailing downward below the wings. The second bird lacked aigrettes and was somewhat browner, with duller soft parts, giving the appearance of being in first basic plumage (see Cramp and Simmons 1977).

After watching the birds standing still for several minutes, Smith went to telephone Hutt, who with his wife Hazel arrived a short time later. In the interim many birds, including the breeding-plumaged Western Reef-Heron, had disappeared from sight. However, brief views of the browner individual were obtained before it flew off, apparently to inaccessible feeding areas in the swamp. On subsequent days, Hutt and his wife visited the area regularly and observed both individuals returning separately to roost about 1-1.5 hours before sunset. They preferred perches fairly low down in the mangroves, as described by Bannerman (1930), where they concealed themselves in the thick foliage. They

were still present on March 8, when this note was prepared.

Once during the February 20-March 8 period one of the Western Reef-Herons was found away from the roosting area. On this occasion the breeding-plumaged individual was feeding along a three-meter-wide drainage channel in the eastern part of the swamp, where it remained in view for several minutes. It moved with deliberation, its manner seeming rather plegmatic. But this was belied when it suddenly dashed forward, with wings half spread, darting the head and bill forward and extending the neck to a rather remarkable degree. Hutt watched this several times and was impressed by the transformation from the hunched, short-necked posture to swift, darting movement, culminating in a quick downward stab of the formidable bill. This behavior was quite different from the almost continuous rapid running to and fro of the Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*).

Birds from the Palearctic and African regions are thought to cross the tropical



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Atlantic in hurricanes, and especially on the strong, prevailing easterly tradewinds (Murphy 1936, Eisenmann 1960). Herons are notably subject to this phenomenon. There is evidence that the Cattle Egret's colonization of the Americas was begun in this fashion (Crosby 1972). Several Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*) and Gray Herons (*Ardea cinerea*) that had been banded in Europe have been found in the Caribbean region (Bond 1962, Haverschmidt 1983), and both species have occurred in Graeme Hall Swamp (Bond 1965, Bond 1966). With Barbados being a strategic landfall for trans-oceanic avian waifs of all kinds (Eisenmann 1960), the appearance of Western Reef-Herons here is undoubtedly entirely natural.

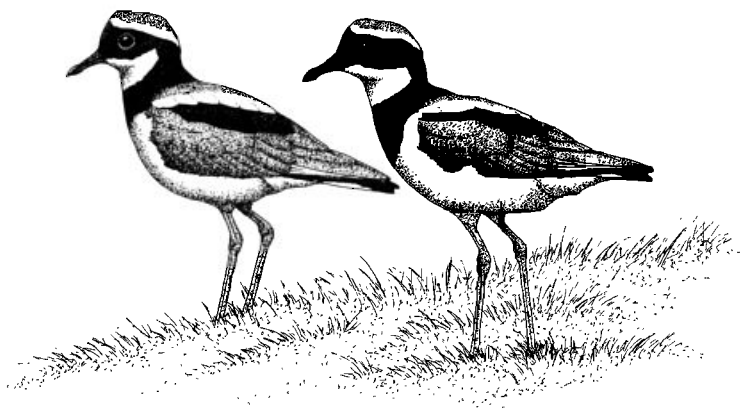
The discovery of this species on Barbados follows by less than a year the first confirmed occurrence of the Western Reef-Heron in the Americas, at Nantucket, Massachusetts (Cardillo *et al.* 1983). Just like the Cattle Egret, which also was first recognized for North America in Massachusetts (Drury *et al.* 1953), the Western Reef-Heron's natural appearance in this hemisphere has been greeted with amazement and skepticism (*e.g.* Roberson 1984). The spread of the Cattle Egret from the Caribbean region into North America has been attributed in part to socialization with Snowy Egrets (Crosby 1972). The appearance of the Western Reef-Heron in Massachusetts may have been due to similar behavior, which was described by Cardillo *et al.*; Davis (1968) has shown that Snowy Egrets migrate between the northeastern United States and the southern Caribbean region.

It is possible that these sightings as well as ones reported recently in Europe signal the early stages of a Western Reef-Heron population expansion. We urge other observers to watch for this attractive species in the Americas. We thank Richard A. Forster for his comments on an earlier draft of this note.

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## A sighting of a Black-legged Kittiwake in Saint Lucia

*A first record for the Lesser Antilles*

*Douglas J. Graham*

ON FEBRUARY 16, 1982 the author and W. M. Graham were observing a flock of seven Royal Terns (*Sterna maxima*) that were perched on a small rock about five meters off shore at Pigeon Island National Park, Saint Lucia (14°5'N, 60°58'W). As we were watching the terns, about 20 meters away, a gull rounded the headland and landed next to the terns. The gull initially stood about 20 cm apart from the terns. At first there were no interactions but after several minutes the gull faced one of the terns and they appeared briefly to touch bills. Immediately thereafter the gull flew off and was quickly lost to sight.

The gull was observed with 9 × 25 binoculars while it was both perched and in flight. Viewing conditions were excellent. The following description of the gull is based on the field notes of both observers. While it was standing among the terns it was noted as being slightly smaller than them. The bill was fairly small and of an unmarked clear yellow color. The head was pure white, except for the hindneck and rear crown, which were a dark gray, and a distinct, well-defined gray spot (about twice the size of the eye) just behind and below the eye. The mantle, upperparts, and wing co-

verts were dark gray, slightly darker than the hindcrown. The wing tip was black, forming a clearly defined triangle at the tip. No white was observed on the wing tip on the standing bird nor during excellent views in flight. The underparts, underwing, and tail were all pure white. One of the observers (W.M.G.) noted the leg color as being dark.

Based on the plumage descriptions in Grant (1982), the gull was an adult, winter-plumaged Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*). The complete lack of black markings on the bill and on the wing except at the tip would likely indicate an adult plumage although apparently some second-winter plumages are almost indistinguishable from adult winter plumages (Grant 1982).

It would appear that this sighting represents the first record for this species in the Lesser Antilles and indeed, one of the most southerly records ever published. In the western Atlantic the species winters south to North Carolina and less frequently as far south as Bermuda and eastern Florida (American Ornithologists' Union 1983). Bond (1979) records it as a vagrant in the West Indies, with winter records from the Bahamas, Cuba, and off Jamaica. Neither Bond (1979) nor the

American Ornithologists' Union (1983) mention any other more southerly records although Jourdain (*in* Witherby 1941) include an otherwise undocumented record from "off Venezuela", this record is not mentioned by Meyer de Schauensee and Phelps (1978) in their account of Venezuelan birds.

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