

enue. I checked this new wetland about every day between 1 and 13 August. There were always several hundred shorebirds of 12 different species, and numerous herons, egrets, and cormorants.

On 14 August, the Lake Calumet Ecological Park sponsored a field trip and folks came from all over the city. The Chicago Ornithological Society contingent was there including Craig Thayer, John Staudinger, Lois and Ray Lohmann, Dennis Lane, and Phyllis Gruver. They were anxious to explore the new wetland, so we headed out to the middle basin before everyone else. I had just focused my scope on an island in the middle of the basin when I noticed a darkish-looking bird standing behind several Great Egrets. It was noticeably smaller, so I thought I might have my Little Blue Heron for the year. I remarked, "I think I have a little blue on the island."

Everyone immediately turned their scopes on the bird, but it wasn't being very cooperative as it lurked behind the Great Egrets. The debate began. "It's an immature great blue."

"No it's not!"

"It has to be a little blue. Look how small it is."

"Are you sure? Is it really small or is it just the angle you're looking from?"

Ray Lohmann produced the National Geographic bird guide and passed it around. After studying the plates I realized why we couldn't agree. Something was wrong about both choices. The bird was too small to be a great blue, but little blues don't have bills so big and thick. Besides, the bill looked almost completely dark! This bird had a lanky look; its legs and neck seemed long in proportion to its body.

At that point the image of an unidentified heron I had seen years before in Illinois came back to me. I

grabbed the Geographic again and looked at the paintings of Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*). Now everything was starting to click: dark legs, thick bill. Yet there was no feeding dance characteristic of this species. Sometimes you just have to take a chance. So I blurted out, "Bet this is a Reddish Egret."

The response was an incredulous, "Right."

I couldn't blame them for being skeptical. But finally our avian friend got hungry and started to hop around, swinging its wings like a mad man. There was no longer any doubt. I don't know who hopped higher, the bird or us. Just then the rest of the field trip participants caught up with us. Walter Marcisz and Jim Landing confirmed our identification. It was an immature Reddish Egret.

I spent the rest of the afternoon calling friends, walking back and forth on the dike, greeting folks, and enjoying the egret with them. It was just like Andy Warhol predicted. This was my 15 minutes of fame.

The bird was seen by many observers and also photographed. I last saw the egret 24 September 1993 as I was doing my usual lunch hour birding at Lake Calumet. The egret was feeding at the Big Marsh, then flew in and perched on a log not far from where I was standing. The final sighting was 2 October 1993 when John O'Brien and Paul Pisano watched the egret at dusk.

Descriptions of the Lake Calumet Reddish Egret are pending in-

vestigation. If accepted, this would be the first valid record for Illinois.

Distribution

The Reddish Egret breeds from Baja California and the Gulf Coast (Florida to Texas) south to the West Indies and Central America. In the eastern U.S. it has been recorded as a vagrant up the Atlantic coast to Nova Scotia and, inland, in Missouri, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania (DeSante and Pyle 1986).

The fall of 1993 produced three additional sightings, all in the Midwest (Kenneth J. Brock in litt.): 21-22 August, Kingsburg, Indiana; 5-8 September, west of Colfax, Jasper County, Iowa; and 2 August, Point Mouillee State Game Area, Monroe County, Michigan. All are state records pending review by their respective state ornithological record committees.

In Illinois, Bohlen (1989) lists the Reddish Egret as hypothetical. He doubts Nelson's 1877 assertion that "this species was quite common" in Illinois. The only other report, at Chain-of-Rocks Bridge, Chouteau Island, Madison County, 29 July 1949, was rejected by the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee (Goetz 1990).

Sue Friscia
3417 W. 123rd St.
Alsip, IL 60658



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