

## FIRST RECORD OF PURPLE HERON (*ARDEA PURPUREA*) FOR TOBAGO AND THIRD FOR SOUTH AMERICA

ROBERT A. BEHRSTOCK<sup>1</sup> AND MARTYN KENEFICK<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>10359 S. Thicket Pl., Hereford, AZ 85615, USA; e-mail: rbehrstock@cox.net;

<sup>2</sup>36 Newalloville Avenue, San Juan, Trinidad and Tobago; e-mail: martynkenefick@hotmail.com

**Abstract:** On 2 February 2010, a Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) was observed in a small wetland in southwestern Tobago. It was photographed on 7 February and subsequently was seen by numerous observers through 26 April 2010. This occurrence represents the first record for Tobago and, along with single records from Trinidad and Brazil, the third record for South America.

**Key words:** *Ardea purpurea*, distributional record, Purple Heron, Tobago, trans-Atlantic vagrant

**Resumen:** PRIMER REGISTRO DE *ARDEA PURPUREA* PARA TOBAGO Y TERCERO PARA SUDAMÉRICA. Un individuo de *Ardea purpurea* fue visto el 2 de febrero de 2010 en un pequeño humedal al suroeste de Tobago. El mismo fue fotografiado el 7 de febrero y visto subsecuentemente por varios observadores hasta el 26 de abril de 2010. Este incidente representa el primer registro para Tobago y junto a otros registros individuales de Trinidad y Brasil, el tercero para Sudamérica.

**Palabras clave:** *Ardea purpurea*, registro de distribución, Tobago, vagrante transatlántico

**Résumé :** HÉRON POURPRÉ (*ARDEA PURPUREA*) : PREMIÈRE DONNÉE DE PRÉSENCE À TOBAGO ET TROISIÈME MENTION POUR L'AMÉRIQUE DU SUD. Le 2 février 2010, un Héron pourpré (*Ardea purpurea*) a été observé sur une petite zone humide au sud-ouest de Tobago. Il a été photographié le 7 février et a ensuite été revu par de nombreux observateurs jusqu'au 26 avril 2010. Ces observations constituent la première mention de l'espèce à Tobago et la troisième pour l'Amérique du Sud après une donnée de présence à Trinidad et une au Brésil.

**Mots clés :** *Ardea purpurea*, donnée de répartition, erratisme transatlantique, Héron pourpré, Tobago

Hérons are strong fliers with a high potential for long distance dispersal. Records of trans-Atlantic vagrants reaching the new World often pertain to single individuals. However, two Old World species, the Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) and the Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), have crossed the Atlantic on enough occasions and in sufficient numbers to develop breeding populations in the New World (Murphy 1992, Kushlan and Hancock 2005).

Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) is one of the Old World's most widespread waders, nesting from Europe and Africa eastward through the Indian subcontinent to Indonesia, the Philippines, Borneo, and the Celebes, and reaching northeastern China and the Russian Far East. Both resident and migratory populations exist. European populations are migratory, wintering in tropical Africa and giving rise to vagrants recorded in Great Britain, Scandinavia, Siberia (Kushlan and Hancock 2005), and very likely those recorded in the Caribbean and South America.

On 2 February 2010, participants on a Naturalist Journeys birding and nature tour, along with Tobago birder Gladwin James, visited the Bon Accord Integrated Development Water Treatment Ponds on

Alfred Crescent Road, Bon Accord, Tobago (11° 9.7'N, 60°49.8'W). This site is 0.9 mi NE of Tobago's Crown Point Airport. At about 1300, James and Behrstock noticed a heron make a short flight at the wetland on the opposite (south) side of the road from the water treatment ponds. They were able to point out the bird to two other tour participants before it walked into tall, emergent aquatic vegetation and out of sight.

After its initial brief flight, the four observers subsequently viewed the heron for about 1 min at a distance of 30 m or less and with a variety of 8× and 10× binoculars. In flight, its wings appeared brown and duller than its neck. The pale-edged coverts and flight feathers indicated that the bird was a juvenile. The bird landed in the open and could be seen from its belly upward. Overall, it was similar in general shape to one of the slimmer herons such as Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*). The bill was slender compared to that of a Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) and appeared to be a dull orange-horn color, darker above. The most arresting features were the upper breast which had fine, dark, vertical streaks, and the back of the neck, which was a warm, cinnamon-brown color. The front of the neck was white-



Fig. 1. An immature Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) at the Bon Accord Integrated Development Water Treatment Ponds, Bon Accord, Tobago, on 7 February 2010. Photos by Dave Smith (left) and Matt Kelly (right).

or nearly so. The bird lacked the dark crown and eye stripe of an adult. Having seen many Purple Herons in southern Europe and Africa, Behrstock quickly identified the bird and discussed its field marks with the other observers. Sadly, no one in the group was able to obtain photos of the bird.

Several days later, Behrstock mentioned the heron in an e-mail to Kenefick, who would soon be visiting Tobago. On 7 February, Kenefick relocated the heron and arranged to have a few local birders photograph the bird (Fig. 1). The bird lingered at least through 26 April 2010 (when photographed by Willem Steffelaar), and was seen and photographed by a number of other birders.

Purple Heron was previously known from Trinidad and Tobago on the basis of a single immature discovered by Kenefick at Caroni in western Trinidad, ca. 93 km SW of the Tobago site. It was observed from 24 September to 10 October 2002 and documented with photos (Kenefick 2005, Kenefick and Hayes 2006). Other large Old World waders that have occurred in Trinidad and Tobago include Gray Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) known from nine individuals (both islands); Little Egret, known from more than 50 individuals (both islands) and now breeding in the Caribbean; Western Reef-Heron (*Egretta gularis*), documented once each on Trinidad and on Tobago; and Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), photographed on Tobago, where two were said to have been present (Murphy 1992, Kenefick and Hayes 2006).

Elsewhere in South America, Purple Heron is known from a single individual present 11–13 June 1986 at Isla Fernando de Naronha, Brazil (Teixeira

*et al.* 1987). In the Caribbean, Purple Heron has been recorded three times from Barbados between the months of September and April (Buckley *et al.* 2009).

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