

## YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT HERON IN CALIFORNIA

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According to the work of Dawson (1923) and Grinnell and Miller (1944), there were no records of the Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) occurring in California. Grinnell and Miller did state, however, that there was "ground to expect stragglers from the south across the Mexican line into San Diego County." Since the time of these works there have been five or six California records (McCaskie 1964, Small 1974), none of which are from Orange County. All sightings have been from coastal California, except the Claremont-Harbor Park bird(s) of 1963 (see Appendix).

Because of the paucity of sightings of this species, I was astonished to see a Yellow-crowned Night Heron while driving with Ken Hoffman through the San Joaquin Marsh, Irvine, Orange County, on the morning of 11 May 1977. The bird was an adult in full breeding plumage (Figure 1), and was standing on a bare branch about 7 m above ground in a tree next to the road. The bird was first observed at 0745, but was



Figure 1. Adult Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*), San Joaquin Marsh, Irvine, Orange County, California, 11 May 1977.

Photo by Don Hoechlin

## NOTES

shortly lost from view for approximately 1 hour. The bird then reappeared on a snag where it remained for approximately 4 hours, being closely observed and photographed. The bird then moved deeper into the marsh and continued to do so for the remainder of the afternoon, being last seen at 1630.

The Yellow-crowned Night Heron occurs throughout much of the eastern United States, around the Gulf of Mexico and in parts of South America with a separate population, *N. v. bancrofti*, in western Mexico (Palmer 1962). A bird collected at Imperial Beach in 1963 (McCaskie 1964) was identified as *N. v. bancrofti*, and it is suspected that the other birds found in California were of this same race.

Although rare in California, the Yellow-crowned Night Heron may occur somewhat more often than the records indicate because immature birds (only adults and subadults have so far been identified) can be easily overlooked and dismissed as immature Black-crowned Night Herons. But field identification can be made if the longer-legged appearance and the shorter wider bill are appreciated. The greyer coloration and lesser amount of spotting on the back and wings are less easily discerned. In flight, one of the best field marks is the extension of the entire foot and a portion of the tarsus beyond the end of the tail. Only a portion of the foot extends beyond the tail in the Black-crowned Night Heron, if the tail feathers are fully grown.

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## LITERATURE CITED

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Palmer, R. 1962. Handbook of North American birds. Vol. 1. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, CT.  
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## APPENDIX

Records of Yellow-crowned Night Heron in California are listed in chronological order. AFN refers to *Audubon Field Notes* and AB to *American Birds*.

1. Venice, Los Angeles Co., last week June 1951. AFN 5:308, 1951.
2. Imperial Beach, San Diego Co., 3 Nov 1962, one adult. AFN 17:67, 1963.
3. Claremont, Los Angeles Co., 27 Mar-3 Apr 1963. AFN 17:357, 434, 1963.
4. Harbor Park, Los Angeles Co., 30 May-2 June 1963, may have been the same bird reported from Claremont. AFN 17:434, 1963.
5. Imperial Beach, San Diego Co., 22-25 Oct 1963, adult male (specimen). AFN 18:73, 1964.
6. San Rafael, Marin Co., 12 July 1968-25 Aug 1968; 3 May 1969-3 Sept 1969; 10 May 1970-27 July 1970; 29 May 1971; 28 May 1972; 5 Nov 1972; 29 June 1973-Oct 1973, one adult. AFN 22:643, 1968; AFN 23:100, 1969; AFN 23:620, 1969; AFN 23:690, 1969; AFN 24:89, 1970; AFN 24:639, 1970; AFN 24:712, 1970; AB 25:794, 1971; AB 26:803, 1972; AB 27:113, 1973; AB 27:913, 1973; AB 28:100, 1974. One was present at this locality for six consecutive summers (AB 27:913, 1973), presumably the same individual. A subadult was reported in 1968 and 1969, and an adult thereafter.
7. Irvine, Orange Co., 11 May 1977, adult. AB 31:1047, 1977.
8. Tomales Bay, Marin Co., 5 July 1977. AB 31:1183, 1977.

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