

INTERMEDIATE EGRET (*EGRETta INTERMEDIA*) IN THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS, ALASKA

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The western Aleutian Islands, Alaska, are well known for the occurrence of migrant birds from Asia (Gibson and Byrd 2007). In addition to many Asiatic waterfowl, shorebirds, and passerines, no fewer than six taxa of Asiatic herons have occurred there. Of these herons, the Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*), Chinese Egret (*Egretta eulophotes*), Little Egret (*Egretta g. garzetta*), and Asiatic subspecies of the Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis coromandus*) are known from a single record each, while the Indo-Pacific subspecies of the Great Egret (*Ardea alba modesta*) and Old World subspecies of the Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax n. nycticorax*) are both known from multiple occurrences (Gibson and Byrd 2007). To this impressive list can now be added the Intermediate Egret (*Egretta i. intermedia*).

Since the 1970s field biologists have studied nesting seabirds (Procellariidae, Hydrobatidae, Phalacrocoracidae, Laridae, Alcidae) at Buldir Island (see Byrd and Day 1986), the easternmost of the western Aleutians (at 52° 21' N, 175° 56' E) and the most isolated island in the Aleutian archipelago. During the first weeks following the arrival of the summer 2006 field party, Lorenz and other biologists discovered the carcasses of a total of seven herons—on 25 May an adult Great Egret and an adult Black-crowned Night-Heron, on 28 May a second adult Great Egret, on 30 May an adult Intermediate Egret, and on 7 June three more adult Black-crowned Night-Herons. The first Great Egret found was estimated to have been dead about a week when discovered, and we suspect that all seven herons arrived on the passage of a single storm from the west—like many aggregations of birds in prior seasons, at Buldir and elsewhere in the Aleutians.

All seven specimens are on deposit at the University of Alaska Museum (UAM), where they were prepared, variously, in response to individual decomposition, as study skin, study skin/partial skeleton, or spread wing/skeleton; frozen genetic samples were taken from each. There was no report of a heron elsewhere in the Aleutians in spring 2006.

The Intermediate Egret, an adult male in nuptial plumage (Figure 1), was so identified in the field, where skinned, sexed, and salted. The specimen was ultimately prepared (UAM 22603) as a study skin with accompanying frozen genetic samples. Its measurements included wing (chord) 304, tarsus 114.2, and bill 74.1 mm. For comparison, published measurements (means in parentheses) for *Ardea alba modesta* (10 males) are wing 340–380 (366.4), tarsus 135–167 (153.8), and bill 98–125 (112) mm (Vaurie 1965); for *Egretta i. intermedia* (sexes combined) wing of 13 specimens 275–327 (299), tarsus of 7 specimens 93–111 (106), and bill of 14 specimens 66–76 (72.8) mm (Cramp and Simmons 1977); and for *Bubulcus ibis coromandus* (10 males) wing 243–260 (253.8), tarsus 80–91 (85), and bill 66–77 (71.1) mm (Vaurie 1965). Our specimen is identified as *Egretta intermedia intermedia* by measurements, long nuptial plumes on the chest and back, all-dark legs and feet, and gape extending to beneath, and not beyond, the orbit. Nominat *intermedia* (including *plumifera*) is the race found throughout the range of the species, except for sub-Saharan Africa (Dickinson 2003); it occurs widely in eastern and southern Asia from Japan, China, and India east through the Philippines and Indonesia to Australia; the northern populations are migratory (Vaurie 1965). As its name suggests, the Intermediate Egret is of a size between that of the larger Great

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Figure 1. Intermediate Egret (*Egretta intermedia*) as found 30 May 2006 on Buldir Island, Alaska.

Egret and the smaller Little and Cattle egrets. Its proportions and overall size, luxuriant white nuptial plumes on breast and back, dark legs and feet, and sharply pointed dark-tipped yellow bill all help to identify it. No heron of North American origin is known from the Aleutian Islands.

Because of the uncertain provenance of a unique British Columbia specimen (see Macoun and Macoun 1909, Brooks 1923, Kermode 1923a, b, Munro and Cowan 1947, Godfrey 1986, Campbell et al. 1990), the Intermediate Egret has been maintained for many years by the American Ornithologists' Union (1931 et seq.) as of hypothetical occurrence in North America. The species resurfaced recently in AOU-area literature when a heron in nonbreeding plumage photographed at Midway Atoll, Hawaii, was identified as *E. intermedia* (Richardson 1999); that bird is now thought to have been instead a Cattle Egret (*B. i. coromandus*; Banks et al. 2004).

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