

## SHORTER CONTRIBUTIONS

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FIRST SPECIMEN RECORD OF GREAT WHITE HERON (*Ardea herodias occidentalis*) IN VIRGINIA--Reports of a Great White Heron (*Ardea herodias occidentalis*) near Fishers Hill, Shenandoah County, Virginia, began appearing on the Virginia Birding (VA-BIRD) listserv on 5 November 2006. In addition to these reports, a different bird was sighted during the same timeframe in Maryland at the Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge (Kent County) and spent about one month in the area (P. Davis, pers. comm.). The Great White Heron is currently considered a subspecies of the Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), and is typically restricted to coastal habitats of southern Florida (including the Keys), Cuba, the Isle of Pines, St. Thomas, Anegada, and formerly Jamaica (Butler, 1992). According to notes posted on the VA-BIRD listserv on 5 and 7 November 2006, local residents stated that the bird had been in the area for a "few months" and that it appeared "after the hurricane." Although Tropical Storm Ernesto was only briefly categorized as a hurricane, the National Weather Service (2006) reported the storm as tracking across the southern half of Florida before moving northward across the eastern third of North Carolina and Virginia (30 August to 2 September 2006) and is presumably the hurricane referred to by the local residents. Sightings of this Great White Heron (Fig. 1) were reported until near the end of November 2006. On 1 December 2006, one of us (C. Willis) contacted the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution about donating a dead specimen of a Great White Heron that was found on 28 November 2006. Just prior to this, the dead bird was found in a culvert in Tumbling Run off Battlefield Road (Va. Rt. 601). The bird was buried for one day before it was salvaged. This is the first specimen record of a Great White Heron from Virginia (USNM 602093). The complete specimen record and photographs of the living bird (courtesy Rob Simpson) can be found on the Division of Birds searchable database (<http://acsmith.si.edu/emuwebvzbirdsweb/pages/nmnh/vz/DtlQueryBirds.php>). At the time of preparation, body mass was 1,972 g. with no body fat; Butler (1992) reported a weight range of 2.1 - 2.5 kg for this species. This bird did not appear emaciated and stomach contents included fresh vegetation, crayfish parts, and mammal hair. The male (testes = 9 x 3 mm) bird was all white, with bright yellow powder down patches. Reports on the listserv that the bird was



Fig. 1. Great White Heron at Fishers Hill area in Shenandoah County, Virginia. November 2006 (photo: Rob Simpson).

struck by a car are consistent with the neck trauma found during specimen preparation.

Other sight records of the Great White Heron in Virginia include one from Daleville (Botetourt County) 1-4 June 1976 (Opengari, 1978). Three of single individuals were reported from South Holston Lake (Washington County), 15-16 October 1990 (Hall 1991), 29 August–12 September 1991 (Knight, 1992), and 25 August 1994 on the Virginia portion of the lake (Lewis, 1995). These three sightings possibly involved returning birds in at least some years (Ilf, 2003). Two, presumably different birds from South Holston Lake were reported 7-29 August 2002 and at Briery Creek Lake (Prince Edward County) 4 September–14 October 2002 (Ilf, 2003). Another bird was also sighted in Patrick County, 24-26 May 1997 (C. T. Kessler, pers. comm.), and photographed (by Jan Wiley) as it waded along a short stretch of the Smith River 0.75 miles southeast of the small community of Charity (Va. Rt. 704 and Rt. 40). Additional museum specimens of the Great White Heron should be collected when available to further document this species in Virginia.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Rob Simpson provided the photograph of the living bird and suggested that the specimen be donated to the Smithsonian Institution. Ray Ritenour and James Allamong coordinated the transfer of the specimen to C. Willis. Claudia Angle provided advice on preparation and catalogued the specimen. Chan Robbins and Bruce Peterjohn (USGS) reviewed the manuscript and Phil Davis provided information about the 2006 Maryland sighting. We extend a special thanks to the Virginia birders who posted notes about this bird sighting, especially L. Friedman, C. Friend, S. Heath, J. and B. J. Little, and R. Simpson.

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