

**LITTLE BLUE HERON AT COURTENAY:  
SECOND RECORD FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA**

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An immature Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) was discovered feeding in a channel at the mouth of the Courtenay River, Vancouver Island, on September 19, 1993, by Margaret Clayton and Isobel McLeish. When the observers saw the large white bird in the channel, they realized it was not a species to be expected in the Courtenay area. They then began the process of identification, consulting their bird guides. The bird appeared similar in size to a Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), a familiar bird in the area. The long beak, the long legs, the all-white plumage, and the size suggested that this bird belonged to the heron family. Turning to the heron section in the field guides confirmed this first conclusion. But the next question was-- which species of heron? With the bird before them, the finer diagnostic field marks could be observed and compared to the illustrations in their guide books. The conclusion that this was indeed a Little Blue Heron rested on characteristics of the bill, legs, and feet.

Six other local birders, learning of the find, were also able to study the Little Blue Heron and confirm its identity. These other birders were Walter Fitzpatrick, Jim and Betty Lunam, Fr. Charles Brandt, and Douglas and Marian Innes. I also wrote field notes on the bird and took photographs to submit to the BCFO Records Committee. An abridged summary of my field notes is as follows:

"Large heron or egret, smaller than Great Blue Heron. Bill light gray-green with a black tip. Head, neck and body white. Legs and feet greenish. No obvious tail. Eyes yellowish; lores gray-blue. Tail end dusky grey but not obvious. [ED. NOTE: This probably refers to the wingtips rather than the tail tip.] Behaviour-- wading in channel up to belly. Heron catches small fish, flies to piling; Glaucous-winged Gull leaves same piling."

Unfortunately, the Little Blue Heron could not be relocated on September 20th, and was thus seen only by the 8 observers who watched it on the 19th.

This is only the second record of Little Blue Heron for British Columbia, and the first for Vancouver Island. The first B.C. record was a bird which frequented Judson Lake, on the B.C.-Washington boundary near Abbotsford, from about 15 October 1974 to 5 January 1975 (Weber and Hunn 1978, Campbell et al. 1990). This bird was seen on both sides of the international border, and also provided the first record of Little Blue Heron for Washington. There is one additional record for Washington; an immature Little Blue Heron remained at Crockett Lake, Whidbey Island, from 14 to 28 October 1989 (Tweit and Fix 1990). There are only three Little Blue Heron records for Oregon (Schmidt 1989, Fix 1990): one adult on the Willamette R. in Marion and Polk Counties, 16-18 May 1985, one immature at Milwaukie, 18 June 1987, and one immature at Brownsmead, near Astoria, 15 January to 23 March 1990. As noted by Campbell et al. (1990), "The Little Blue Heron has increased in California during the past two decades (Unitt 1977) but still remains accidental in the Pacific Northwest". Most of the Pacific Northwest records, the Courtenay bird included, consist of immature birds recorded during the fall of the year, in keeping with the widespread pattern of northward dispersal of juveniles in the fall seen in many species of herons (Coffey 1943).

**LITERATURE CITED**

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*Dark-Eyed Junco: photo by A. Poynter*