

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*, a new record for the southern Ecuadorian Andes

LA GARCETA AZUL (*EGRETTA CAERULEA*), UN NUEVO REGISTRO PARA EL SUR DE LOS ANDES DEL ECUADOR

Pedro X. Astudillo^{1,2} & Luis F. Muñoz¹

¹ Escuela de Biología, Ecología y Gestión, Universidad del Azuay, Av. 24 de Mayo 7-77, Cuenca, Ecuador.

² E-mail: pastudillo@uazuay.edu.ec

Summary

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) is recorded for the first time in the southern Ecuadorian Andes, in the province of Azuay. There are few records in the Andes of Ecuador, and most observations are located in the northern province of Imbabura. We observed and photographed an adult on the shores of an artificial lake at La Paz. This report suggests that the species may be locally distributed through the Ecuadorian Andes, with potential movements between the east and west of the Andean cordillera.

Keywords: Ardeidae, adult plumage, inter-Andean corridor, local distribution.

Resumen

Se reporta por primera vez a la Garceta Azul (*Egretta caerulea*) en el sur de los Andes del Ecuador, en la provincia del Azuay. Existen pocas observaciones en los altos Andes del Ecuador, y la mayoría de estas observaciones están localizadas en el norte en la provincia de Imbabura. En la localidad de La Paz, a orillas de un lago artificial se fotografió y observó a un individuo adulto. Este registro sugiere que la especie se podría estar distribuida localmente en los Andes ecuatorianos, con potenciales movimientos entre la cordillera oriental y la occidental.

Palabras clave: Ardeidae, corredor inter-Andino, distribución local, plumaje de adulto.

The distribution of Little Blue Heron, *Egretta caerulea*, ranges from North America to southern South America (Fjeldså & Krabbe 1990) with a few records in Argentina (Agnolin *et al.* 2009). In Ecuador this species inhabits marshes, mangroves, flooded grasslands, as well as fresh and saline water bodies particularly in the western lowlands where it is considered fairly common to common (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001). However, there are few records in the Ecuadorian highlands, including Yaguarcocha and San Pablo wetlands (2200-2600 m.a.s.l.), Imbabura province and more recently at Yambo Lake (~2700 m.a.s.l.), Cotopaxi province (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001, Henry 2012, Guevara *et al.* 2012).

On 13 December 2013, we photographed an adult and observed it for c. 15 minutes on the shores of an artificial lake in La Paz (3° 19' 48.65'' S, 79° 09' 38. 34'' W, 3054 m.a.s.l.), 10 km west of Nabón, Azuay province. The species was recognized by its blue-grey plumage with dark bill and legs (Fig. 1). It was solitary but sharing the habitat with Andean Gull, *Chroicocephalus*

serranus, and Andean Teal, *Anas andium*. The individual of *E. caerulea* left in an easterly direction after the arrival of *C. serranus*.

This observation is ~250 km south of Yambo Lake, in the north-central Andes (Henry 2012, Guevara *et al.* 2012). This record indicates that the species also occurs, at least occasionally, in the southern Andes. La Paz is a high elevation inter-Andean zone, which possibly act as a corridor between the eastern and western cordilleras, suggesting that this record may constitute an example of inter-Andean movement. However, more studies are needed.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully thank Jacinto Guillén and Edwin Zárate from Universidad del Azuay for continued support of our research efforts. We also thank all the 2013-14 Ecology students who helped locate the species. This paper benefited from editing and advice from David C. Siddons and two anonymous referees.



Figure. 1. Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) at La Paz, Nabón, province of Azuay in Ecuador, 13 December 2013 (Photo: PXA).

Literature cited

Agnolin, F. L., Chimento, N. R., Frank, C. & Lucero, R. F. 2009. Nuevos Registros de Aves Argentinas. *Nótulas Faunísticas* 34 (2): 1-4.

Fjeldså, J. & N. Krabbe. 1990. *Birds of the high Andes*. Zoological Museum, University of Copenhagen and Apollo Books. Svendborg, Denmark.

Guevara, E. A., Santander, T. & J. F. Duivenvoorden. 2012. Seasonal Patterns in Aquatic Bird Counts at Five Andean Lakes of Ecuador. *Waterbirds* 35 (4): 636-641.

Henry, P. 2012. Distributional and altitudinal range extensions for birds from Ecuador. *Boletín Sociedad Antioqueña de Ornitología* 20 (2): 89-106.

Ridgely, R. S. & P. J. Greenfield. 2001. *The birds of Ecuador*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca, New York.