

Vermont Bird Records Committee  
Records of Vermont Birds

Rare Species Bird Report

Species: Tricolored Heron

Number Observed: 1

Observers Making Report: JC and Valerie Biebuyck

Location: Route 7, pond just south of Wood's Market Garden, Brandon, Rutland County

Date: May 14, 2015

Time and Length of Observation: ~9:00 am, ~20 seconds

Distance from Bird: Minimum 20 feet, maximum 30 feet

Weather: Clear and sunny

Light in relation to observer's position: As we were driving north, we saw the bird in front of and to the right (east) of us. We looked at it as we passed it. JC was driving, so he could not see it after we had passed it. Valerie continued to look at it after we had passed it. We were looking down at the bird from a slightly elevated perspective, so the sun was not directly behind the bird, and we were able to get a good (although brief) look at its colors. There was no glare.

Temperature: ~70 degrees Fahrenheit

Wind speed: Unknown, but it was not windy

Optical Equipment: No equipment

Observer's Previous Acquaintance with This Species or Similar Forms: We had an apartment near the Gulf Coast of Florida for two years because our daughter attended school there. We observed numerous Tricolored Herons during that time, in addition to Great Blue Herons, Little Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Reddish Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Green Herons, Black-crowned Night Herons, Yellow-crowned Night Herons.

Other Documentation: No

Habitat: Pond edged by reeds, water lily vegetation in the middle. Bird was standing next to the pond on a slope that declined toward the pond.

Bird's Behavior: Standing still, body facing west (giving us a full-frontal view of breast), head pointed north (giving us a profile of head).

Relative Size and Shape: Smaller than a Great Blue Heron, larger than the Little Blue Herons we typically saw in Florida.

Head: Predominately gray, white streamer off back of head.

Neck: Reddish sides, white front

Bill and Feet: Long bill, long legs. Did not observe color, could not see feet.

Upper Back: Gray.

Breast, Belly, Flanks, Undertail Coverts: White breast extending to neck that had white front, reddish sides. Flanks gray. Belly white. Could not see undertail coverts.

Wings: Gray

Tail: Gray

What Similar Species Were Eliminated When Making This Identification and How Was This Bird Different?

Eliminated Great Blue Heron. We have seen Great Blue Herons at that pond before, and this was not a Great Blue Heron. This bird was smaller than a Great Blue Heron, and its neck had reddish sides and a white front. Eliminated Little Blue Heron. This bird was larger than the Little Blue Herons we remember seeing in Florida. The bird we saw also had a white feather streaming from the back of its head.

Comments:

JC: "We were driving north on Route 7. I looked over and saw a large wading bird standing next to a pond. I expected it to be a Great Blue Heron. Then I noticed that it was smaller than a Great Blue Heron, and thought that it looked larger than a Little Blue Heron. What also struck me as different was the reddish neck with the white front. I then said "Oh, look, a Tricolored Heron. Is that rare in Vermont?" We had seen so many in Florida that I did not really consider whether or not it is typically found in Vermont."

Valerie: "I was in the front passenger seat looking down at my iPad when JC said "Tricolored Heron!" I looked up as our car was about to pass the bird. I saw a large wading bird with a neck that had reddish sides and a white front. The head was gray with a white streamer off the back. I said "Oh, yeah." I did not note its size relative to the Great Blue Heron, but its colors did not seem right for a Great Blue Heron. I've seen a lot of Tricolored Herons in Florida, and it seemed more like a Tricolored Heron. I was distracted as we were driving someone to the airport and I was in the process of making hotel reservations, so I did not focus on the frequency or infrequency with which this species occurs in Vermont.

I later checked VTBIRDS and found one Tricolored Heron reported in 2012. I then emailed Marv and Sue Elliott, two very experienced birders. They, in turn, notified Sue Wetmore, another very experienced birder. (I am attaching these emails to this report). Sue checked the pond from 5:46-6:00 am the next day, and the Elliots checked it that afternoon, without seeing the bird. JC and I saw the Elliots and Sue Wetmore at the West Rutland Marsh monitoring walk on March 16 and we talked about it. Although none of them saw the bird, Sue Wetmore encouraged us to submit a Rare Bird Report.

JC and I have been birding since 2012 and it has become a passion. We enthusiastically and diligently try to bird as much as possible, and to educate ourselves about birds and birding. We understand the pitfalls of seeing an unfamiliar or uncommon bird and jumping to a conclusion that is not supported by reality. JC is a radiologist, so he is trained to look at things and quickly discern patterns, note interruptions in those patterns, and notice "what is different, what doesn't belong". He is certain we saw a Tri-colored Heron."

From: **Valerie Blebuyck** <valbub@gmail.com>  
Subject: Tricolored Heron?  
Date: May 14, 2015 at 7:15 PM  
To: **Marvin Elliott** <birdhouses@yahoo.com>, **Susan Elliott** <evenbird14@YAHOO.COM>

Greetings —

JC and I were driving north on Route 7 this morning at about 9:00. In the pond just south of Woods' Market Garden (which is just a little south of the Brandon town center) we saw what we are sure is a Tricolored Heron. We did not have time to stop, but JC saw it first (like he always does!) and said "Oh, look! A Tricolored Heron!" and I looked and said "Oh, yeah!" We've seen a lot of them in Florida, and we are pretty sure that's what it was even though we saw it briefly. Smaller than a Great Blue Heron, reddish neck, no white in the head like a Great Blue.

I just did a search of Vermont postings for Tricolored Heron and found one in 2012, and that birder was advised to submit the sighting to eBird and fill out an RSD. I feel stupid not to have stopped to try and take a photo (even with our phones!).

Is this as unusual as it seems it might be?

I am too chicken (even as a birder!) to post it on the list serve in the event I am wrong. I don't want to be responsible for every birder in Vermont to come flocking (pun intended) to that pond in case it turns out to be a wild goose chase (pun intended). Or a wild Tricolored Heron chase. I guess that would be good for business at Woods Market Garden (which is excellent and has the best fresh corn I have found in Vermont).

I don't want to cry "Tricolored Heron!" too many times or no one will believe me! Just wanted to let you know in case you wanted to see if it is still there.

Thanks,  
Val

From: **Marvin Elliott** <vtbirdhouses@yahoo.com>  
Subject: **Re: Fwd: [VTBIRD] Tri-colored Heron at Greenberg Reserve**  
Date: **May 14, 2015 at 9:39 PM**  
To: **Valerie Blebuyck** <valbieb@gmail.com>

Vai,

I asked Sue Wetmore to look for it tomorrow. She has something else going on but will try. A photo will do the trick and it doesn't have to be an award winner. Just something to show the field marks. We are going to Blueberry Hill tomorrow and have lots of catching up around the house but may get up to take a look too.

Marv

Marvin Elliott  
Vermont Birdhouses and Wood Products  
Rutland Town, VT  
802-775-2415  
vtbirdhouses@yahoo.com

From: Valerie Biebuyck <valbieb@gmail.com>  
To: "marvin Elliott ovenbird14@yahoo.com" <vtbirdhouses@yahoo.com>  
Sent: Thursday, May 14, 2015 7:18 PM  
Subject: Fwd: [VTBIRD] Tri-colored Heron at Greenberg Reserve

Here is the Tricolored Heron posting from 2012.

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: MARIE HEMEON <mariekevinhemeon@MSN.COM>  
To: [VTBIRD@LIST.UVM.EDU](mailto:VTBIRD@LIST.UVM.EDU)  
Sent: Wednesday, June 13, 2012 7:20 PM  
Subject: Re: [VTBIRD] Tri-colored Heron at Greenberg Reserve

I don't know if you have but. you should submit the sighting to ebird and fill out an RSD for the committee. If possible, a return with even a point and shoot for a picture attempt. I think if you could get even a poor shot at the right angles, it would be helpful. Kevin (still not Marie).

----- Original Message -----

From: Amanda Pompili <mailto:ivmeer@HOTMAIL.COM>  
To: [VTBIRD@LIST.UVM.EDU](mailto:VTBIRD@LIST.UVM.EDU) <mailto:VTBIRD@LIST.UVM.EDU>  
Sent: Wednesday, June 13, 2012 5:56 PM  
Subject: [VTBIRD] Tri-colored Heron at Greenberg Reserve

This Sunday morning, June 10, I was at the Norman and Selma Greenberg Conservation Reserve on Rt 7 in Bennington, VT. I saw a Tri-Colored Heron at about 6:30 a.m. in the wetland on the right side of the bridge (that is, on the right side if you are walking into the reserve, not out). It was quite startled by me and flew away squawking loudly. I got a very good look at its back, which was a sort of brownish/peachy color. It was about the size of a Snowy Egret or a little smaller, but

**From:** Valerie Blebuyck <valbleb1@gmail.com>  
**Subject:** Fwd: Tricolored Heron?  
**Date:** May 15, 2015 at 10:32 AM  
**To:** Sue Wetmore <2birdv1@comcast.net>

Hi, Sue —

Thank you for following up on this!

My husband and I were driving someone to the airport so did not stop, but I wish we had! We've seen a lot of Tricolored Herons in Florida (our daughter went to school there for two years) so we just thought "Oh, a Tricolored Heron", but did not realize that would be unusual in Vermont.

We will be passing by there later today and will check again.

Take care,  
Val

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Valerie Blebuyck <valb-eb@gmail.com>  
**Subject:** Tricolored Heron?  
**Date:** May 14, 2015 at 7:15:30 PM EDT  
**To:** Marvin Elliott <vtb.rhousess@yahoo.com>, Susan Elliott <qyenprg14@YAHOO.COM>

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