

FIRST RECORD OF BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*NYCTICORAX NYCTICORAX*) IN NEVIS, WEST INDIES & A POSSIBLE BREEDING PRESENCE

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*Abstract.* --- Ian Hart photographed a recently deceased immature (as per Raffaele *et al* 1998)/juvenile (as per Life Year system)/juvenal (as per Humphrey-Parks system) Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) on the Longpoint Road circa one mile from the deep water port of Long Point on the southern side of the island of Nevis, in St. John Figtree Parish, Nevis, The Federation of St. Christopher and Nevis, West Indies, on 2 October 2011.

*Key words.* --- Caribbean, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Nevis, *Nycticorax nycticorax*.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

The Black-crowned Night-Heron (the scientific name means ‘night raven’) (spelling as per AOU 1998) is the most widespread heron in the world, breeding on every continent except Antarctica and Australia (Hothem *et al* 2010: 2). It is most active at dusk and at night: It is an opportunistic forager that feeds on a wide variety of terrestrial organisms, but their diet consists primarily of fish and other freshwater and marine organisms (Hothem *et al* 2010: 2).

ITS CURRENT RANGE & PRESENCE IN THE WEST INDIES

This species has an extremely large range (Birdlife International 2009). The AOU (1998: 46) does not show this species breeding in the Lesser Antilles but does show it breeding generally on the islands of the Bahamas and generally on the islands of the Greater Antilles. The AOU (1998: 46) does indicate that this species becomes more widespread in the North American winter and can be found through the islands of the Lesser Antilles. This species does breed extensively throughout the Western Hemisphere and the Old World (see AOU 1998: 46 for fuller details of ranges of occurrences in North America and Birdlife International 2009 for worldwide occurrences).

NEVIS

Nevis is a compact oceanic island of volcanic origin with an area of circa 93 km<sup>2</sup> (circa 36 square miles), situated in the northern Lesser Antilles. Politically it is a portion of the two island country, The Federation of St. Christopher and Nevis. The island of Nevis rises gradually from the shore to a central peak of circa 985 meters (circa 3232 feet) and exhibits a range of natural and secondary habitats which include: elfin woodland, montane forest, palm brake,

grassland, coastal scrub, dry woodland, and farmland (Robinson and Lowery 2000). Much of the island is in an anthropogenically prolonged state of succession from the substantial denudation of most elevations up to and exceeding 1000 feet in elevation which occurred over most of the island from the 16<sup>th</sup> century through the 20<sup>th</sup> century for the purposes of plantation agribusiness and monotypic cotton and/or sugarcane agriculture.

#### THE RECORDED SIGHTING

On 2 October 2011 Ian Hart observed and photographed (Figure 1) a single deceased specimen of an immature Black-crowned Night-Heron on the Longpoint Road, circa one mile from the Nevis deep water port at Long Point, St. John Figtree Parish, Nevis, West Indies on the south south-western quadrant of the island (Ordinance Survey 1984: Nevis). The location was: c. 17°07'23.31" N and c. 62°37'06.93" W, at an elevation of c. 146 feet, and c. 0.6 miles from the Caribbean Sea. There are no known fresh water sources within a c. ½ mile radius of the specimen. The specimen was photographed using an iPod Touch (a multi-faceted portable electronic device manufactured by Apple Inc. with photographic imaging capabilities) (Figure 1).

#### FIRST RECORD

Raffaele (1998: 457) does not show this species as having been documented on the artificially and politically conjoined islands of St. Christopher (St. Kitts) and Nevis: Benito-Espinal (1990: 42) also does not show this species having occurred on the island of Nevis. Queries directed to representatives of *North American Birds* further indicate no record from the island of Nevis: E-bird Caribbean (2011) additionally does not show any reports of this species on the island of Nevis.

The Records Committee of The Nevis Ornithological Society (The NOS) acknowledges this record as a first of this species on the island of Nevis which was documented in a manner other than a casual inclusion in an unexamined listing (The photograph in Figure 1 was compared to specimens in the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History, Bird Division, in Washington, D.C., USA and acknowledged experts in the field of ornithology were consulted). The NOS acknowledges that others may have seen or thought they may have seen this species of bird previously on the island of Nevis, but scientific and academic rigor was not applied in its listing, recording, and /or reporting: Widespread dissemination was not made of potentially useful and detailed information for the furtherance of scientific ornithological queries and considerations.

The immature state (July to February – Sibley 2000) of this photographed bird coupled with: 1) The presence of documented breeding of this species in islands of the Greater Antilles and the Virgin Islands in reasonable geographic proximities to the island of Nevis (Raffaele *et al* 1998); and 2) the stage of the molt at what otherwise would be the early part of the seasonal migration from North America (October – April) by migrants that breed in North America and are considered uncommon to rare non-breeding residents in the Lesser Antilles, raises the possibility that this bird was born on the island of Nevis and, if so, would thereby evidence the resident and breeding resident status of this species on the island of Nevis. Substantial additional research and documentation must be done before this possibility is documented as a reality in fact.

This is the 154<sup>th</sup> avian species reported for the island of Nevis.

#### MOLT PATTERN OF THIS BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON

This particular deceased bird appears to have been in the process of a juvenile molt (July to January) associated with its calendar life cycle as used in Sibley (2000: 65).

#### SALVAGED REMAINS

A single wing with feathers was retained and resides in the private collection of Ian Hart, Nevis, West Indies.

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**Figure 1. Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) found then recently deceased on Longpoint Road, circa a mile from the deep water port, dated 2 October 2011. Photograph by Ian Hart of Nevis, West Indies.**