



UNUSUAL SIGHTING DOCUMENTATION

Person Submitting: August Mirabella

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215-368-0594

0809-01-2002

**Species:** Great Blue Heron (white morph)

**Observers:** Found by: George Francois

Seen by: A. Mirabella and then many others later

**Date Seen:** 8/11/02 thru 9/12

**Time:** All day 8/11/02

**Where Observed:** Green Lane Reservoir, Hanover Twp., Montgomery Co. near  
Pennsburg, PA

**Conditions:** Sunny/Hot. Seen with Leica APO77 Zoom as close as 150ft.

**Behavior & Habitat:** Feeding at lake edge and roosting in trees.

**Description:** This report is specific to my first sighting on 8/11 as I saw it several more times through 9/12. Others saw it after 9/12, and possibly by Cameron Rutt before 8/11, who didn't ID it at that time. The bird was the same size as a Great Blue Heron, which on occasion was seen nearby. It was mostly white with the exception of some pale cinnamon wash on the wing coverts and possibly tertials. Higher up above the cinnamon were a somewhat orderly row of pale gray spots. I don't know if these were still on what were the wing coverts or the scapulars. I don't know where one ends and the other begins on this bird. This would indicate an immature bird according to the Sibley Guide. The legs varied in color depending on the light, looking quite gray at times with a trace of yellow to showing quite a bit of yellow on the upper legs. The bill was larger than the Great Egret and similar in size to the Great Blue. The bill was dirty blue-gray-black on the top and yellow on the bottom.

**Similar Species Comparison:** Larger than Great Egret that was frequently nearby. Leg color & bill color/size also different as noted above.

**Previous Experience:** Seen in Florida

**References during ID:** Sibley Guide to Birds; National Geographic Guide, etc.

**References after ID:** Sibley Guide to Birds and my video

**Other Documentation:** Videotape submitted with this report by A. Mirabella

**Date of report:** 8/12/02

**Signature of Observer:** August Mirabella

*August Mirabella*

## Documentation to PORC

0801-01-2002

Species: Great-White Heron (white morph of Great-Blue Heron)

Person Submitting Data: Cameron Rutt

Address: 727 Blooming Glen Rd, Blooming Glen, PA 18911

Phone: (215)-453-9585

Date: July 25, 2002

**\*\*NOTE:** This bird was located and identified by George Franchois on the morning of 8/11 and subsequently seen by many observers including myself. I do not want to take away from George Franchois' find and identification but since this is an unusual sighting for the state the earliest date would be of value. At the time of my sighting (on 7/25) I did not identify the heron that I saw but upon seeing it again on 8/11 it made me realize what I had previously seen.

Observers: Cameron and Bob Rutt

Date(s) Seen: 8/11 through 8/22 (as of this writing) plus this sighting on 7/25

How Long Observed: Off and on for 10-20 minutes

Where Observed: Traveling north from Green Lane on Rt. 29, turn left on Knight Rd. and cross Rt. 663. Turn right on Church Rd. and then right again to a small parking lot where there is access to Green Lane Reservoir. The bird was viewed in this cove. This location is near Pennsburg, Montgomery County.

Conditions: ~8:10-8:30 PM, light was fading as it was nearing dusk, but the sun was to my back. Observed at a variety of ranges including fairly close. Viewed through a 20x-60x spotting scope.

Behavior and Habit: I noted that this heron was relatively slow moving as it was moving around in the shallow water and/or mudflat edges. It didn't make any running motions but did move a considerable distance over the period of observation.

Species Description: I noted in my records a number of days after the sighting but still well before (more than a week) George Franchois' sighting on 8/11 this: (in exact words) Unusual heron or egret, large and relatively slow moving, darkish upper mandible and yellowish lower mandible, pale legs, not black, gray(?). As you can tell I was confused by the leg color. It appeared to me that the legs looked differently each time I looked at them, possibly due to the changing light. I do want to say, though, that the legs were definitely not jet black. I also did notice that the lores on the bird were dark. I did not

have any other white herons or egrets to compare this bird to size-wise at the time so this made judging the size more difficult and less relevant. Upon seeing the bird again on 8/11, I noticed once again that the legs "changed" color on this bird. When it was perched up in the shadows the front of the legs appeared to be fairly dark gray, paler at the base of the legs. But when I saw the bird with the sun behind me sitting in the open the legs looked a lot more pale so this helped reduce my previous confusion I had about the leg color. The bill and the lore color overall appeared identical to me between the two sightings: 7/25 and 8/11.

Similar Species: Great Egret: has jet black legs and feet in all plumages, yellow or green lores and a yellow bill with only a little bit of black on the tip and culmen of the bill.

Snowy Egret: smaller size. adult- black legs with yellow feet, yellow lores. juv-pale lores, variation in bill color with some showing pale base and dark tip. Other more typical juv. show yellow feet with black forelegs (usually) and bright green behind the legs.

Little-Blue Heron: smaller size. juv- pale lores with two toned bill showing pale base and dark tip.

Reddish Egret: smaller size, very active. white morph adult- bicolored bill with pink base and dark tip, light lores. juv.-all dark bill. 2nd year- dark bill with just a sliver of pale color where the two mandibles meet.

Cattle Egret: very small. adult-all yellow bill, light lores. juv.-all dark bill, very dark legs.

080A-01-2002

## Great White Heron

**Date: August 11, 2002**

**Location: Near Green Lane Reservoir, Montgomery Co., PA**

When I arrived at the area of the Waste Treatment Plant near Green Lane Res., the bird was perched in a tree along the lake shore. It was about 100-200 yds. away. The bird was observed through 7x42 binoculars and a 20-60x scope. During most of the observation time the bird was perched in the tree preening. It did fly once and landed on the shoreline, but then quickly flew back into the trees. The total viewing time was about one hour.

Description: Even at this distance the large size could be appreciated. The bird was the size of a Great Blue Heron with a long thick neck. The overall plumage was white, with small dusky brown or black patches in the scapulars and secondaries. A prominent feature was the size and shape of the bill. The bill was long, stout and straight without any curvature that I could see. The upper mandible was grayish, while the lower mandible was yellow. The legs were long like those of a Great Blue Heron. The front of the legs appeared dark while the back of the legs were a pale yellow-green. The feet were dark.

Elimination of similar species:

Great Egret is slightly smaller with a thinner neck and has a completely dark-yellow bill and all dark legs.

White-morph Western reef-Heron is supposed to have greenish-yellow legs with yellow feet. The Literature also reports that W. Reef-Heron is more the size of a Little Egret or Snowy Egret.

I think the large size of this all white bird eliminates all other North American herons and egrets.

Nick Pulcinella  
613 Howard Road  
West Chester, PA 19380  
610-696-0687

0801-01-2002

## Great White Heron ...Pennsburg, PA

On August 11, Sunday morning 7:55, while birding at the *Upper Montgomery Joint Authority* sewer plant adjacent to the Green Lane Reservoir, Pennsburg, Montgomery County, PA, I observed a large white wader in the mud, interacting with a Great Blue Heron sitting on a snag above it. Clearly the white wader was dominate in its aggressive mannerisms toward the Great Blue. The two birds flew off together for a few seconds before separating. The white wader was at least as large as or larger than the Great Blue. Comparing the white wader with a nearby Great Egret, the white wader was clearly more robust with a thicker neck, a long straight dagger-like bill (upper mandible chiefly horn-color, lower mandible smudgy pink/orange/yellow), and thicker dusky greenish-yellow legs. Loral area was bluish-gray. Possibly due to feather contouring, very slightly darker scalloping was noted on the wing coverts and scap area.

Judged this bird to be perhaps a Second Summer **Great White Heron** because of the duskiess of the bill and legs. Literature in my posession illustrates very little about immature plumages and soft part coloration of a "Great White." Perhaps Sibley on page 60 comes closest to the bird I saw, except leg color difference (dusky greenish-yellow rather than buffy-gray.) See also Angus Wilson's wonderful web-site: [www.oceanwanderers.com/NYGWHeron.html](http://www.oceanwanderers.com/NYGWHeron.html) for bird similar to the bird found. I've had experience with the bird in the Florida Keys circa 1978.

I remained on site with the exception of a phone call or two until 11:45 AM.. Subsequent observers included August Mirabella and Devitch Farbotnik each taking some video which will follow under separate cover. The weather was clear and warm with sun at my back enabling good looks with my 8 x 44 Bausch and Lomb Elite binoculars and my now antiquated but trusty 15-60x Swift spotting scope as close as 50 yards to the subject bird.

Habitat consisted of receding shoreline (drought conditions) in a cove next to sewer plant. The bird was extremely site faithful throughout its presence here. The "Great White Heron" was last seen on Sep 24 at the location it was found.

Species: Great Blue Heron...White morph *Ardea herodias occidentalis*

No. of individuals 1 Sex undetermined

Age: my guess 2<sup>nd</sup> summer

Initial date of observation: 11 August 2002 @ 7:55 AM

Location: Upper Montgomery Joint Authority Sewage Treatment Plant adjacent to Green Lane Reservoir, Pennsburg, Montgomery County PA.

Observer: George Franchois  
911 Lake Lane  
Pennsburg, PA 18073  
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215.679.6619

## Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

### Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: Great White Heron ( Ardea herodias occidentalis)

Date of Sighting: 11 August 2002 to 24 September 2002

Location: GREEN LANE RESERVOIR

County: MONTGOMERY

Observer(s): George Franchois and multiple observers

Date of Submission: 2002

Submitted by: George Franchois, August Mirabella, Devich Farbotnik, Nick Pulcinella, Elaine Ryan

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

Specimen: No

Recording: Video

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
<i>R. Wittent</i>								
G. Armistead	X							
D. Heathcote	X							
P. Guris	X							
J. Stanley	X							
E. Witmer	X							
B. Leberman	X							
M. Sharp	X							
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>7</b>							
<b>DECISION</b>	<b>X</b>							

Comments: 7/10

Signature (Secretary): Date:

*[Handwritten Signature]*

*2/20/05*