

GREAT BLUE HERON

Ardea herodias

non-breeding visitor, occasional

A.h. wardi / *herodias*?

A.h. fannini?

Great Blue Herons breed throughout North America and migrate as far as n. S America for the winter (AOU 1998). They also disperse widely following breeding. Vagrants have been recorded as far as Europe (Cramp and Simmons 1977), Clipperton I (Howell et al. 1993), and the Hawaiian Islands within the Pacific Basin (Pratt et al. 1987). A large Ardeid, possibly a congener, has been found in the subfossil record of e. O'ahu (Ziegler 2002). It inhabited the island 120-800 thousand years ago.

There is a single record of Great Blue Heron for the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands* of a bird well described at Tern Island, **French Frigate**, 20-22 Sep 1988 (although Gray Heron, *A. cinerea*, of Eurasia and with records for Alaska, is only marginally ruled out). In the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* they have been recorded on Lehua islet off **Ni'ihau** and on **Kaua'i**, **O'ahu**, **Moloka'i**, **Maui**, and **Hawai'i I**. It is difficult to determine how many birds have reached these islands due to apparent regular movements of this species between locations on islands and almost certainly between islands. For example, a bird first observed at Opaepa Pond, Hawai'i, 19 Jul-12 Sep 1981 (Ashman *et al.* 1982a; [HRBP](#) 0150) was followed by one at the Ki'i unit of JCNWR, O'ahu 24 Sep-16 Oct 1981, one in Wailua, Kaua'i, 26 Nov 1981, and then one back at Ki'i beginning 6 Dec 1981, readily explained by a single bird moving up and down among these islands. There are several other series of observation such as this during non-overlapping periods between islands. Careful examination of records suggests that an estimated minimum total of 12-14 birds have reached the islands as follows: one at Pearl Harbor, O'ahu, during the last week of Feb 1963 (*E* 23:59); one at Kealia Pond, Maui, 6 Apr 1970 (*E* 30:106); 5-6 from Jul 1981 (Hawai'i) to Apr 1992 (Kaua'i) throughout the Southeastern Islands (e.g., [HRBP](#) 0709); 3-4 from Feb 1995 (Hawai'i) to Jun 1999 (Maui) also throughout the islands (e.g., [HRBP](#) 1100, 1330); one Jun-Sep 2000 on Kaua'i and Lehua Islet ([HRBP](#) 1311-1313; VanderWerf *et al.* 2007); one Apr-Jun 2002 on Hawai'i I; one Dec 2004-Mar 2007 on Hawai'i, O'ahu, and Kaua'i ([HRBP](#) 5825-5827), and other or the same individuals on Kaua'i 6-26 Mar 2007 ([HRBP](#) 5826-5827) and 20 Feb 2008. Multiple birds apparently arrived in the falls of 1987 (*AB* 42:140, *E* 48:22) and 1995. Two to three birds observed at once were recorded at Pearl Harbor, O'ahu Nov 1987; Ki'i, O'ahu Dec 1987; Kanaha Pond, Maui, Oct 1987-Mar 1988; and Nu'upia ponds, O'ahu, in 1996 ([HRBP](#) 1100, 1330).

The subspecies of Great Blue Herons reaching the Hawaiian Islands cannot be confirmed. Three subspecies breed in w. North America and all could account for Hawaiian vagrants: *A.h. fannini* of se. Alaska and w. British Columbia, *wardi* of the Pacific United States coast, and nominate *herodias* breeding across interior North America and perhaps being the most migratory subspecies (Pyle 2008). The photograph from Lehua Islet ([HRBP](#) 1311-1313) show a large pale bird, consistent with either *wardi* or *herodias*, while photographs from O'ahu and Maui ([HRBP](#) 709, 1100, 1330) show what appear to be smaller and darker birds, more consistent with *fannini*.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)