

SNOWY EGRET

Egretta thula

non-breeding visitor, vagrant

monotypic

Snowy Egrets breed in most of the contiguous United States and throughout Central and South America (AOU 1998). In the post-breeding season some wander irregularly north to S Canada and SE Alaska, and then withdraw to winter in w. and s. U.S. and southward. In the Pacific vagrants have reached Clipperton, the Galapagos, and the Revilligedos Is (Howell et al. 1993, AOU 1998) as well as the Hawaiian Islands (Scott et al. 1983, Pratt et al. 1987), where there are four confirmed records.

Snowy Egrets and other small white herons and egrets were virtually unknown in the Hawaiian Islands prior to 1950, likely related to decreased source populations resulting from plume hunting during the first third of the century. Several small egrets observed during the mid-1970s through the early 1980s were reported as Snowy Egrets, but Scott et al. (1983) described the similarity in soft-part colors between Snowy Egret and [Little Egret](#) of Eurasia, and emphasized the difficulty in separating these in the field (see also *AB* 36:221). They concluded that an individual reported from Mohouli Pond, Hilo, Hawai'i 15-20 Jan 1975 (*E* 37:151, 43:79) and 1-2 at Kanaha Pond 5 Dec 1980-7 Apr 1981 were only identifiable as Snowy/Little egrets (*cf.* Pyle 1977), but that one on O'ahu in 1980 with nuptial plumes (see below) was a confirmed Snowy Egret. They also concluded that birds of this species pair reaching these islands seem more likely to be Snowy than Little egrets since most migrants and vagrants to the Southeastern Islands are North American in origin; however, several observations in 1982-1990 were thought possibly to be Little Egrets ([which see](#)). Additional records (to the two detailed above) of Snowy/Little egrets not confirmed to species were observed at Hanalei NWR, Kaua'i 24 Jul 2001; the Kahuku area of O'ahu 5 May 1985 and 3 Jun 1991; Kealia Pond, Maui 16 Jan 1994 and 30 Apr 1996; and Loko Waka Pond near Hilo, Hawai'i I 1-8 May 1988.

The following records from the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* include descriptions of soft part colors ruling out Little Egret. A bird with nuptial plumes at Nu'upia Pond, *O'ahu* 6-31 Mar 1980 ([HRBP](#) 0085-0086, 0129-0130, 0385-0386, 0575-0576, published *E* 43:79 and *AB* 34:817) is the earliest confirmed record of Snowy Egret in the Hawaiian Islands (Scott et al. 1983; see above). Other well-documented birds were present at the Ki'i Unit of JCNWR 15 Nov 1997-10 Mar 1998, Kealia Pond, *Maui* 19 Dec 1988-3 Feb 1989, and Waiakea Pond, Hilo, *Hawai'i I* Oct 1997-Mar 1998.

Two white herons or egrets observed during the 1800s, one by Finsch (1880) at Kahului, Maui, and one near Hilo, Hawai'i (Rothschild 1900, Henshaw 1902a), were reported as *Egretta sacra* ([Pacific Reef-Heron](#)), but Finsch appears to have had them confused with [Black-crowned Night Herons](#), including a "white form" (see also Dole 1879). They also could have been [Great Egrets](#), Snowy Egrets, [Little Egrets](#), or imm. [Little Blue Herons](#) (*AB* 36:221).

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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