

GREAT BLUE HERON

Ardea herodias

non-breeding visitor, occasional

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 or visited the island 120-800 thousand years ago.

Great Blue Heron and the similar [Gray Heron](#) of Eurasia have both been recorded in the Hawaiian Islands and the documentation for some records of each species may not fully eliminate the other species. For example, a reported Great Blue Heron on Lehua Islet off Ni'ihau 1 Jun-8 Sep 2000 ([HRBP](#) 1311-1313; VanderWerf et al. 2007) shows several features of [Gray Heron](#) and, given its possible spring arrival (see [Gray Heron](#)), we consider this record unsubstantiated. Similarly, a report of a Great Blue Heron at Tern Island, *French Frigate* 20-22 Sep 1988, was not well enough described to eliminate [Gray Heron](#), given that Eurasian species are more likely in the Northwestern Islands, although a photographed bird there 4 Oct - 6 Nov 2010 (Howard et al. 2013; [HRBP](#) 6342), which died on the last date, represents the only confirmed Great Blue Heron for the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands*.

In the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands*, confirmed or presumed Great Blue Herons have been recorded 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 Great Blue Heron 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 the island chain. There are several other series of observation such as this during non-overlapping periods between islands. Careful examination of records suggests that a minimum of 14-16 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 all five of the above Southeastern Islands (e.g., [HRBP](#) 0709); 3-4 from Feb 1995 (Hawai'i) to Jun 1999 (Maui) also throughout all five islands (e.g., [HRBP](#) 1100, 1330); singles on Hawai'i I Apr-Dec 2002, Apr 2013-Dec 2014 ([HRBP](#) 6343), and 7-31 Dec 2016 ([HRBP](#) 6344); one on Hawai'i, O'ahu, and Kaua'i ([HRBP](#) 5825-5827) Dec 2004-Mar 2007 and another or the same individuals on Kaua'i 6-26 Mar 2007 ([HRBP](#) 5826-5827) and 20 Feb 2008; and one 27-31 Dec 2016 on O'ahu ([HRBP](#) 6345-6346; present at the same time and not the same as the bird on Hawai'i I). Multiple birds apparently arrived in the falls of 1987 (*AB* 42:140, *E* 48:22), 1995, and 2016. Two to three birds observed at once were recorded on O'ahu at Pearl Harbor Nov 1987, Ki'i Dec 1987, and Nu'upia Ponds in 1996 ([HRBP](#) 1100, 1330); and on Maui at Kanaha Pond Oct 1987-Mar 1988.

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). Most photographs show what appear to be smaller and darker birds, most consistent with *fannini*.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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<http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/birds/rlp-monograph/>