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Two Palearctic herons on Fernando de Noronha, Brazil

by Eduardo Augusto Ferreira, Rogério de Castro, Rafael Fernandes & Andrew Whittaker

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SUMMARY.—We report the first documented record of Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* in Brazil, and the second record of Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, both of them on the island of Fernando de Noronha. A single *A. purpurea* was present between March 2017 and March 2018, and an *E. garzetta* on just one date in March 2017.

The archipelago of Fernando de Noronha (03°52'00"S, 32°25'00" W) lies 356 km off north-east Brazil (Fig. 1). The largest island, Fernando de Noronha, is c.10 km long by 3.5 km wide, and part of the archipelago lies within two protected areas: Fernando de Noronha Marine National Park and Fernando de Noronha-Rocas-São Pedro e São Paulo Environmental Protection Area (Bencke *et al.* 2006). The main island has mostly dry deciduous vegetation with a few man-made reservoirs, the largest being Açude do Xaréu (Castro 2009).

At least 75 bird species have been recorded on Fernando de Noronha (Silva-e-Silva 2008), including several migrant or vagrant water and shorebirds, many of the latter at Açude do Xaréu (Silva-e-Silva & Olmos 2006). Five species of Palearctic herons have been

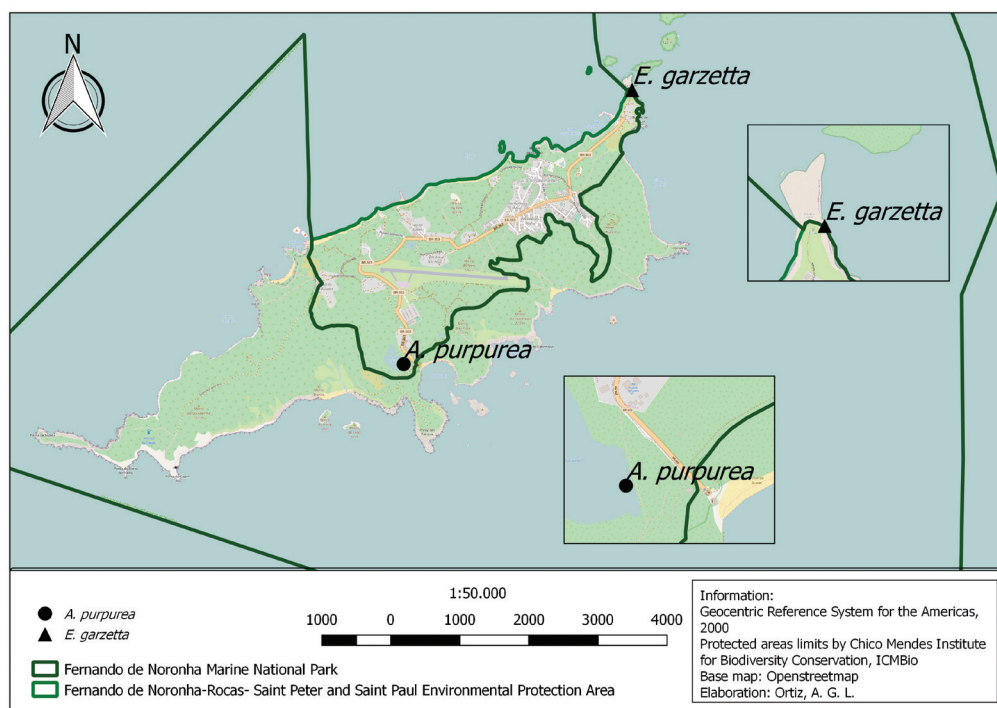


Figure 1. Location of records of Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* and Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* on Fernando de Noronha.

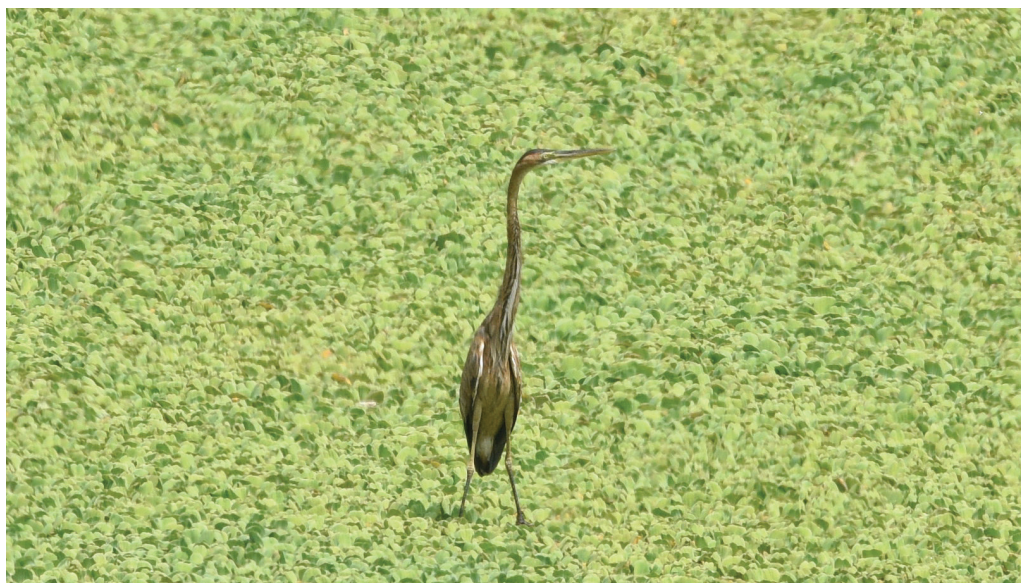


Figure 2. Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, Açude do Xaréu, Fernando de Noronha, Pernambuco, Brazil, March 2017 (Rogério de Castro)

recorded in Brazil: Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, Grey Heron *A. cinerea*, Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*, Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis* and Little Egret *E. garzetta* (Silva-e-Silva & Olmos 2006, Fedrizzi *et al.* 2007, Silva-e-Silva 2008). All records of these species to date are from Fernando de Noronha or Rocas São Pedro e São Paulo, with Purple Heron, Western Reef Heron and Squacco Heron on the former. The many records of *Ardeola ralloides* suggest it is established on Fernando de Noronha (see Whittaker *et al.* in press). However, *Ardea purpurea* was observed only in June 1986, an 'immature', which record lacks documentation (Teixeira *et al.* 1987, Piacentini *et al.* 2015), and the only record of *Egretta garzetta* was at Rocas São Pedro e São Paulo (Bencke *et al.* 2005), a small and isolated group of rocky islets 1,100 km north-east of the coast of Rio Grande do Norte and 630 km north-east of Fernando de Noronha. Here we describe the first documented record of *Ardea purpurea* in Brazil, and the second for *E. garzetta*.

On 19 March 2017 RC observed a young *Ardea purpurea* at Açude do Xaréu (Fig. 2; <http://www.wikiaves.com/2504428>). Identification was straightforward. Young have more uniform brown upperparts feathers with buff fringes, and a dull brown bill and legs, showing much less yellow than adults (Martínez-Villata *et al.* 2019a). On 22–24 March 2017, more photographs were taken by EF. The bird was photographed also on 26 April (<http://www.wikiaves.com/2550155>), as well as 14 August (<http://www.wikiaves.com/2666868>) and 29 December, always in the same place (<http://www.wikiaves.com/2842424>). On 14 March 2018 (when in adult plumage) it was photographed again (<http://www.wikiaves.com/2938367>). AW & João Paulo Ferreira da Silva (JP) saw it on 27–28 March and the bird was observed several more times by JP until late April 2018, at either Açude do Xaréu or Açude do Ema.

On 21 March 2017 EAF photographed (Fig. 3) an adult Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* on Fernando de Noronha at Ponta do Air France (03°49'50"S 32°23'55"W). The bird was identified by its long thin bill, dark legs and yellow feet, and distinctive head, breast and back plumes (Martínez-Villata *et al.* 2019b). Snowy Egret *E. thula* has bright yellow feet (and rear tarsus), yellow lores and is shorter billed (Bencke *et al.* 2005, Martínez-Villata *et al.* 2019b).



Figure 3. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Ponta do Air France, Fernando de Noronha, Pernambuco, Brazil, March 2017 (Eduardo Augusto Ferreira)

Western Reef Heron *E. gularis* is polymorphic in plumage, which can be dark grey, usually with a white throat, white or intermediate, with a mixture of white and grey (Fedrizzi *et al.* 2007, Martínez-Villata *et al.* 2019b). The latter species has the eyes lemon yellow, maxilla blackish, mandible yellowish, and the bill overall heavier and more decurved than in Little Egret *E. garzetta* and Snowy Egret *E. thula* (Fedrizzi *et al.* 2007, Kirwan *et al.* 2019).

Discussion

Ardea purpurea occurs across Eurasia, Africa and Oceania, with migratory populations in the former (Martínez-Villata *et al.* 2019a). Northern European breeders winter in Africa and are capable of making long, non-stop flights, as demonstrated by seven birds marked with satellite transmitters that flew c.4,000 km from the Netherlands to Morocco in 5–7 days, with one *A. purpurea* travelling almost 5,600 km south-west over the Atlantic until it was lost (van der Winden *et al.* 2010). There are few records of the species elsewhere in the Americas: three in Trinidad & Tobago (Kenefick & Hayes 2006, Behrstock & Kenefick 2012) and six in Barbados (Kirwan *et al.* 2019).

Little Egret is also widespread across Eurasia, Africa and Oceania, as well as Australia and New Zealand (Martínez-Villata *et al.* 2019a). Within the last 70 years the species has been increasingly frequently observed in the Americas, especially in the Lesser Antilles and northern South America, with breeding recorded on at least two islands in the West Indies (Downs 1959, Murphy 1992, Kirwan *et al.* 2019).

Our observations add to the growing body of observations of Palearctic vagrants on Brazilian oceanic islands, including Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, European Spoonbill

Platalea leucorodia (Fedrizzi *et al.* 2007), Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (Bencke *et al.* 2005), Lesser Moorhen *Gallinula angulata* (Bencke *et al.* 2005) and Black Kite *Milvus migrans* (Nunes *et al.* 2015). Fernando de Noronha seems to be a particularly propitious site for such vagrants due to its size and the presence of (artificial) freshwater bodies with suitable prey including introduced small fish and frogs.

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