

# LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

## REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC) Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or a similar format when submitting records for review to assure that all pertinent information is accounted for. Attach additional pages or files as necessary. Please print or type for hard copy. For electronic copy, be sure to save this file to your computer before entering text. Attach field notes, drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos for more obscurely marked species. When completed (if hard copy), mail to Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216, or e-mail electronic copy as an attachment to Paul Edward Conover at <[zoiseaux@lusfiber.net](mailto:zoiseaux@lusfiber.net)> .

1. English and Scientific names: Great White Heron, *Ardea herodias occidentalis*
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage): One, probable hatch-year bird
3. Parish: Terrebonne
4. Specific Locality: Whiskey Island (specific loc 29.0489, -90.8199)
5. Date(s) when observed: 01 December 2016
6. Time(s) of day when observed: 1307-1313 CST
7. Reporting observer and address: Robert C. Dobbs, Lafayette, LA
8. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird(s):
9. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s): Jessica Schulz, on 16 November 2016
10. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): Partly cloudy sky, with light on bird ranging from muted light when sun behind thick clouds, to brighter when sun behind thin clouds or, briefly, when not behind clouds. The sun was to my left (west) as I was looking NW at the bird.
11. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Swarovski 8x30 binos (good cond), Nikon f5.6 / 70-200 mm lens (good cond)
12. Distance to bird(s): 100-120 m when bird was standing (majority of obs), then as close as 80-90 m when bird flew, slightly closer to me before heading farther away
13. Duration of observation: 6 min

14. Habitat: Tidal flat at edge of salt marsh (*Spartina alterniflora*), just behind washover fan on aft-dune side of gulf beach (barrier island)

15. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): Standing, seemingly vigilant, throughout obs, which ended when bird flew back into marsh of island interior. Bird was standing about 15 m away from, and about 5 m closer to me than, a Great Egret.

16. Description (include only what was actually seen, not what "should" have been seen; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species, body bulk, shape, proportions, bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species): The bird in question was obviously significantly larger (taller) than Great Egret, which was standing about 15 m away, in similar habitat, light, etc. (photo included of both birds in same frame) In the field, I estimated that the bird was 20-25% taller than the Great Egret.

Plumage was completely white, without a single dark feather, with some off-white or very pale buff tones in underwing coverts (from photos—this was not noted in the field).

Bill was very large, particularly very deep (again, compared to Great Egret ca. 15 m away), and was a dusky yellowish or horn color overall with darker tones on the maxilla, esp. toward its base. Iris yellow. Legs appeared grayish in cloudy, muted light, but exhibited a greenish tinge when struck by brighter sunlight; bottoms of the feet were more yellowish.

17. Voice: Not vocal

18. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation): Great Egret easily eliminated by the bird in question's much larger size and much larger/deeper bill (direct comparison with Great Egret standing ca. 15 m away).

A leucistic or partial albino Great Blue Heron may be quite similar to this bird, but all other images that I've seen of obviously leucistic GBHE have shown at least some darker areas or dark smudging in the plumage (e.g.,

[www.sibleyguides.com/2016/07/white-great-blue-heron-massachusetts/](http://www.sibleyguides.com/2016/07/white-great-blue-heron-massachusetts/)  
[www.sibleyguides.com/2007/11/great-white-heron-not-just-a-color-morph/](http://www.sibleyguides.com/2007/11/great-white-heron-not-just-a-color-morph/)

).

Apart for some slightly off-white or very pale buff on the underwing coverts, which is consistent with hatch-year Great White Heron, the bird's plumage was completely white (and mostly bright white). Leg color on the bird in question was also more consistent with that reported for nonbreeding Great White Heron, described as "brownish or greenish black" (Vennesland and Butler 2011) and "cream yellow to buff gray" (Heron Conservation 2016), and less consistent with that reported for nonbreeding Great Blue Heron, described as "yellowish-green" (Vennesland and Butler 2011).

"Are you positive of your identification if not, explain: " I'm not sure that any of the bird's characters can be invoked to reject the possibility of a leucistic Great Blue Heron with 100% certainty. Leg color, however, is more consistent with that reported for

nonbreeding Great White Heron than nonbreeding Great Blue Heron. That the bird's plumage and soft parts colors are consistent with Great White Heron, and less consistent with a Great Blue Heron, and considering the coastal locality and salt marsh habitat, and the established pattern of vagrancy in Great White Herons, there seems to be little reason to favor a leucism argument.

19. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached? ): Photos, by Robert C. Dobbs

20. Previous experience with this species: I've seen a handful of breeding plumage adults in FL, but I have no experience with immature or first-year birds, or nonbreeding birds

21. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification): Birds of North America (Great Blue Heron account – Vennesland and Butler 2011); Heron Conservation 2016 (Great Blue Heron account – [www.HeronConservation.org](http://www.HeronConservation.org)); Mitra & Fritz 2002 (Two Great White Herons (*Ardea (herodias) occidentalis*) in New York, Sep-Nov 2001. Kingbird 52: 27-34); Nat Geo Guide to Birds of N Am; Sibley Guide to Birds

22. Identification aids used when? After observation

23. Date report completed: 03 December 2016

24. May the LBRC have permission to display in whole or in part this report and accompanying photos on the LOS-LBRC website and LBRC Facebook page? Yes

25. If yes, may we include your name with the report? Yes







