

The first documented record of Western Reef Heron *Egretta (gularis) schistacea* for Tanzania

On 4 March 2012 the four of us were birding at one of our regular spots on the coast at Bagamoyo. It was a wet day and we had retreated early from the adjacent salt pans to the Livingstone Hotel. While waiting for breakfast we scanned the intertidal flats and NEB soon located an unusual egret feeding in shallow water some 200m away that he suspected was a Reef Heron.

RM and SW walked out with their cameras and managed to take excellent photographs which were submitted to the East African Rarities Committee and accepted (Fisher & Hunter 2016; Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Western Reef Heron at Bagamoyo (photo: R. Marais).

All four of us are familiar with the Little/Dimorphic Egrets *Egretta garzetta/dimorpha* that are resident along the Tanzanian coastline. We have all spent considerable time over the years debating this species complex and discussing ways of separating white-plumaged birds that could be either *E. garzetta* or *E. dimorpha*. While none of us has ever reached a firm conclusion, we all realized that the white-plumaged bird before us was clearly different from anything we had seen before along this coast.

As the bird walked closer to us, we could clearly see differences in structure and jizz, most notably the bill shape, colour and size. We are all familiar with the wide variations in the extent of 'colour' on the legs of *E. dimorpha* and did not pay too much attention to this feature.

Britton (1980) did not include *E. gularis* for Tanzania, giving both inland and coastal records of the race *E. g. asha* for Kenya. Dowsett (1993) includes *E. gularis* in his annotated country checklist for Tanzania but without comment.

For interesting discussions on these coastal egrets, refer to Pakenham (1979), Hancock & Kushlan (1984) and Turner (2010, 2014).

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