

**FIRST RECORD OF YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT HERON  
*NYCTANASSA VIOLACEA* (AVES: PELECANIFORMES: ARDEIDAE)  
FROM THE ISLAND OF MADEIRA (NE ATLANTIC OCEAN)**

By CATARINA CORREIA-FAGUNDES <sup>1</sup>,  
HUGO ROMANO <sup>1</sup>, FRANCIS ZINO <sup>2</sup> & MANUEL BISCOITO <sup>3</sup>

With 3 figures and 1 table

*ABSTRACT.* In the present paper *Nyctanassa violacea* is recorded for the first time from the island of Madeira, based on a series of observations of a single bird in the marina of Funchal, from March until December, 2011. This is the 3rd time this bird from the Americas is recorded in the western Palearctic.

*RESUMO.* No presente trabalho *Nyctanassa violacea* é assinalada pela primeira vez para a Ilha da Madeira, com base num exemplar observado repetidas vezes na Marina do Funchal entre Março e Dezembro de 2011. Este assinalamento constitui o terceiro registo desta espécie americana para a região Paleártica ocidental.

---

<sup>1</sup> Madeira Wind Birds, Rua da Pena, 10J, 9050-099 Funchal, Madeira, Portugal.

E-mail: catarinafagundes@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> FCP – Freira Conservation Project, Av. do Infante, 26, 9000-015 Funchal, Madeira, Portugal.

<sup>3</sup> Museu de História Natural do Funchal, Rua da Mouraria, 31, 9004-546 Funchal, Madeira, Portugal.

## INTRODUCTION

Hérons and Egrets (Ardidae) are regularly seen in the archipelago of Madeira, but all records are considered vagrants and to the present date, 10 species have been recorded (ROMANO *et al.*, 2010). Some are common such as the Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea*, Little Egret, *Egretta garzeta* and Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis* whereas others are very rare, for example the Green Heron, *Butorides virescens*, with only 1 record (MATIAS, 2010).

The Black-crowned Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax* is an occasional vagrant to Madeira. It has a worldwide distribution, breeding in North and South America, across Eurasia and South, into Africa and the East Indies (AUSTIN, 1962). The Yellow-crowned Night Heron, *Nyctanassa violacea* is a common bird in the Americas, mostly on the eastern coast (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL, 2009). These two herons vary in their dietary choice. Whilst *N. nycticorax* has a preference for fish (WATMOUGH, 1978), *N. violacea* tends to feed on crustaceans. (RIEGNER, 1982) *N. violacea* is not a fully migratory species, since it may be a permanent resident in warmer areas such as southern Florida (KAUFMAN, 1996; MARTINEZ-VILALTA & MOTIS, 1992). Their movements are mostly dictated by fluctuations of food availability, from colder to warmer areas in late summer (KUSHLAN & HANCOCK, 2005).

## FIELD OBSERVATIONS

On the 24th March 2011 at the Natural History Museum of Funchal, Fernando Silva (FS) approached Catarina Correia-Fagundes (CF) and Hugo Romano (HR) saying that a “different heron” was frequently roosting on his yacht at the marina of Funchal. On the 17th February 2011 this bird was photographed by FS, but unfortunately the photograph was not conclusive enough to distinguish between the Black-crowned Night Heron *N. nycticorax* and the Yellow-crowned Night Heron *N. violacea*. Attempts to observe this bird in the marina and surroundings on 25th and on the 26th March 2011, both during the day and at night, failed. On the 27th March 2011 at 15:15 the bird was spotted at the western pier of the marina and it was photographed and filmed by all the authors (Figs. 1 & 2). The bird was very tame and allowed observations to within 3 m. The plumage pattern and colouration, with small white spots on the wings and upper parts, black / grey bill and the prominent shape of the forehead allowed unquestionable identification as a juvenile of Yellow-crowned Night Heron *Nyctanassa violacea*, as the other possibility, the juvenile of the Black-crowned Night Heron, has larger white spots on the back, a yellowish bill and a less inclined forehead.

According to FS, the bird has been around Funchal marina at least since the end of January 2011.



Fig. 1 - *Nyctanassa violacea* at the Marina of Funchal on the 27th of March, 2011.



Fig. 2 - *N. violacea* in flight at the Marina of Funchal on the 27th of March, 2011.

## DISTRIBUTION

This species, a nocturnal heron, occurs in North and South America (AUSTIN, 1962; BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL, 2009), living in swamp areas, shallow ponds and marshes. (SIBLEY, 2001).

This is the first record of this species from the archipelago of Madeira, and apparently the third record for the western Palearctic, as there are two unpublished records from the Azores, one in the marina of Angra do Heroísmo, Terceira on the 28th of July 2010 and the other at Lajes do Pico on the 25th October 2010 (BIRGUIDES.com, 2011).

## REMARKS

A report on the presence of this species in Madeira was published on-line on the Madeira Wind Birds site ([www.madeirabirds.com](http://www.madeirabirds.com)) on the 27th of March 2011. Subsequently this same bird was seen at least 21 times in the original spot and surroundings (Table 1).

All recorded observations were either in Funchal marina or Parque de Santa Catarina, a public park with a large pond ca. 500 m to the West of the marina, which demonstrates the sedentary behaviour of the bird. In the marina the bird was seen feeding on crabs (*Pachygrapsus marmoratus*) at low tide and on one occasion it was seen eating a cockroach, a feeding behaviour also recorded in North America (KAUFMAN, 1996).

In October 2011 the bird started to molt into the adult plumage (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 - *N. violacea* moulting into adult plumage on the 2nd of October, 2011 at the Marina of Funchal.

**TABLE 1** - List of observations of the Yellow-crowned Night Heron in Madeira from 27th March until 22nd December, 2011.

Date	Time	Place	Observers
27 <sup>th</sup> March	15:15	Western pier at Funchal marina	CF, HR, FZ, MB
10 <sup>th</sup> May	21:00	Western pier at Funchal marina	HR and others
14 <sup>th</sup> May	?	Parque Santa Catarina, Funchal (near the pond)	Marta Nunes, Sofia Nunes
16 <sup>th</sup> May	Evening	Funchal marina	Nick Brooks
17 <sup>th</sup> May	19:35	Western pier at Funchal marina	Daniel Lopez and others
23 <sup>rd</sup> May	?	Funchal marina	Ana Mendonça
13 <sup>th</sup> June	Early morning	Western pier at Funchal marina	Helder Camacho
15 <sup>th</sup> June	Evening	Feeding at western pier and roosting on a boat at Funchal marina	Xabier Ramirez
22 <sup>nd</sup> June	Noon	Parque Santa Catarina (at the pond)	Graham Knight
25 <sup>th</sup> June	16:40	Parque Santa Catarina (on a Peppertree <i>Schinus molle</i> above the pond)	Graham Knight
27 <sup>th</sup> June	Evening	Funchal marina	Roy Dowsett
30 <sup>th</sup> June	21:00	Feeding at western pier of Funchal marina	CF, HR
6 <sup>th</sup> July	Evening	Funchal marina	Mark Bradbery
7 <sup>th</sup> July	Noon	Parque Santa Catarina at the pond	Mark Bradbery
1 <sup>st</sup> August	Morning	Sitting on an American Sycamore tree above the marina restaurants	Max Berlijn
8 <sup>th</sup> August	07:00	Funchal marina	Julian Bell
24 <sup>th</sup> August	23:15	Funchal marina	Micha Arved Neumann
15 <sup>th</sup> September	19:00	Western pier of Funchal marina and sitting on a boat opposite to the pier	Wilken Agster
2 <sup>nd</sup> October	19:40	Feeding at western pier of Funchal marina	CF, HR
11 <sup>th</sup> November	16:30	Funchal marina	Fernando Silva
10 <sup>th</sup> November	?	Funchal marina	Heikki Vasamies
22 <sup>nd</sup> December	07:30	Funchal marina	Bruce Hansen

## CONCLUSIONS

The fact that bird survived and went through a normal moult implies that conditions and diet availability were suitable on the eastern border of the Atlantic.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to Fernando Silva for having shared his observation and his continued interest in bird observation.

## REFERENCES

AUSTIN Jr., OLIVER L.:

1962. *Birds of the World* (Illustrations by Arthur Singer). Paul Hamlyn, London. 317 pp.

BIRDCGUIDES.com:

2011. Yellow-crowned Night Heron *Nyctanassa violacea*. <http://www.birdguides.com/species/species.asp?sp=253> (Last accessed: 15-12-2011).

BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL:

2009. *Nyctanassa violacea*. In: IUCN 2011. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2011.2. <[www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)>. Downloaded on 15 December 2011.

KAUFMAN, K.:

1996. *The lives of North American Birds*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston. 675pp.

KUSHLAN, J. A. & J. A. HANCOCK:

2005. *The Herons*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 456 pp.

MARTINEZ-VILALTA, A. & A. MOTIS:

1992. Family Ardeidae (Herons). In: *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, 1: Ostrich to Ducks (eds.: J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott & J. Sargatal), pp. 376-429. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.

MATIAS, R.:

2010. On a Green Heron, *Butorides virescens*, specimen at a Museum in Madeira. *Bocagiana*, **231**: 1-8.

RIEGNER, M. F.:

1982. The Diet of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons in the Eastern and Southern United States. *Colonial Waterbirds*, **5**: 173-176.

ROMANO, H., C. CORREIA-FAGUNDES, F. ZINO & M. BISCOITO:

2010. Birds of the Archipelagos of Madeira and the Selvagens. II – New records and checklist update (1995-2010). *Boletim do Museu Municipal do Funchal*, **60** (326): 5-44.

SIBLEY, D. ALLEN:

2001. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf. New York. 545 pp.

WATMOUGH, B. R.:

1978. Observations on Nocturnal Feeding by Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax*. *Ibis*, **120**: 356-358.