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SHORT NOTE

A WHITE-NECKED HERON IN THE FAR NORTH

On 3 October 1981, I was called by Mrs Mae Petera to identify a strange bird seen near her house on the Land and Survey farm of Onepu, 16 km north of Houhora.

The heron was feeding in a shallow weed and rush covered pond near a raft of fish floats. Also feeding in the pond were two Pied Stilts (*Himantopus h. leucocephalus*), which the heron avoided; yet it ignored two horses feeding nearby.

From notes and photographs which I was able to take the bird was identified as a White-necked Heron (*Ardea pacifica*). It was about the height of a White Heron (*Egretta alba*) and later, after it was disturbed, it moved toward a standard seven-wire fence where I was again able to photograph it and also get a good estimate of its height.

Its legs and bill were dark grey to black and its head and neck were wholly white. Each wing had in flight two white patches, the larger one just inside the carpal bend. I gained the impression, in flight, a reddish-brown tinge was on the inner wing and the secondaries. The bird was very like that shown by Slater (1970, *A field guide to Australian birds*, Vol. 1) but lacked the dark spots down the neck and the chestnut patches mentioned as being on the crown, hind neck and upper breast.

All these observations were made during mid-morning in perfect sunlight without any wind. In the weeks before, bad weather with predominant south-west winds to 35 knots had prevailed.

The heron disappeared later the same day and despite my best efforts has not been seen since.

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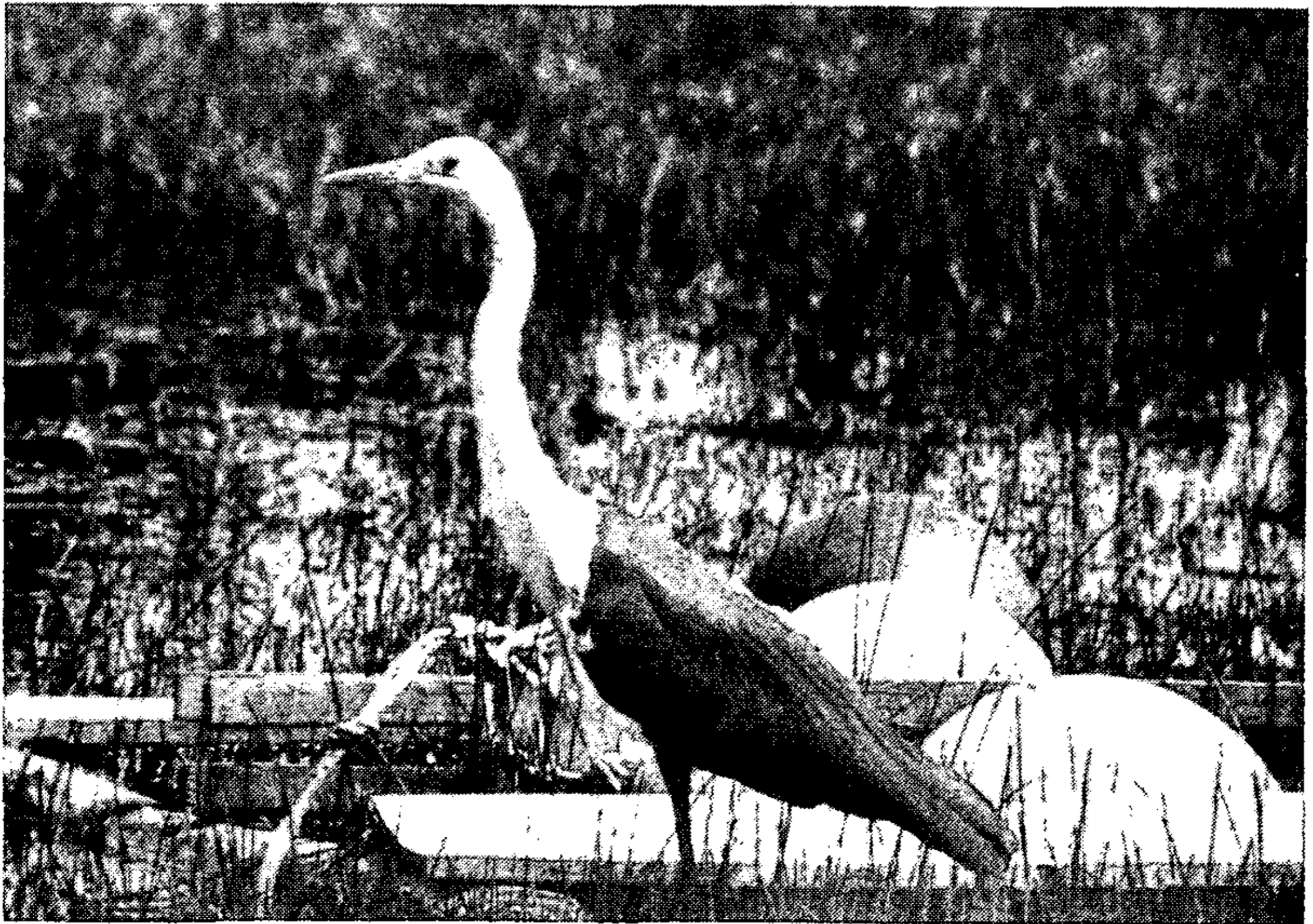


FIGURE 1 — White-necked Heron, from colour photos by V. H. Hensley