

# Little Blue Heron

## *Egretta caerulea*

The status and distribution of breeding Little Blue Herons in Ohio is nearly identical to Snowy Egrets. Summering Little Blues have been annually recorded along western Lake Erie since 1969 (Peterjohn 1989a). In 1978, a pair of herons was discovered among nesting Cattle Egrets within the large heronry on West Sister Island but a nest could not be located (Kleen 1978). The existence of breeding Little Blue Herons on this island was finally confirmed in 1983, when two nests were discovered and photographed. Unlike Snowy Egrets whose breeding population gradually increased during the 1980s, numbers of nesting Little Blues remained constant. Only 2–3 pairs have nested on the island through 1989, and the status of this small population remains precarious.

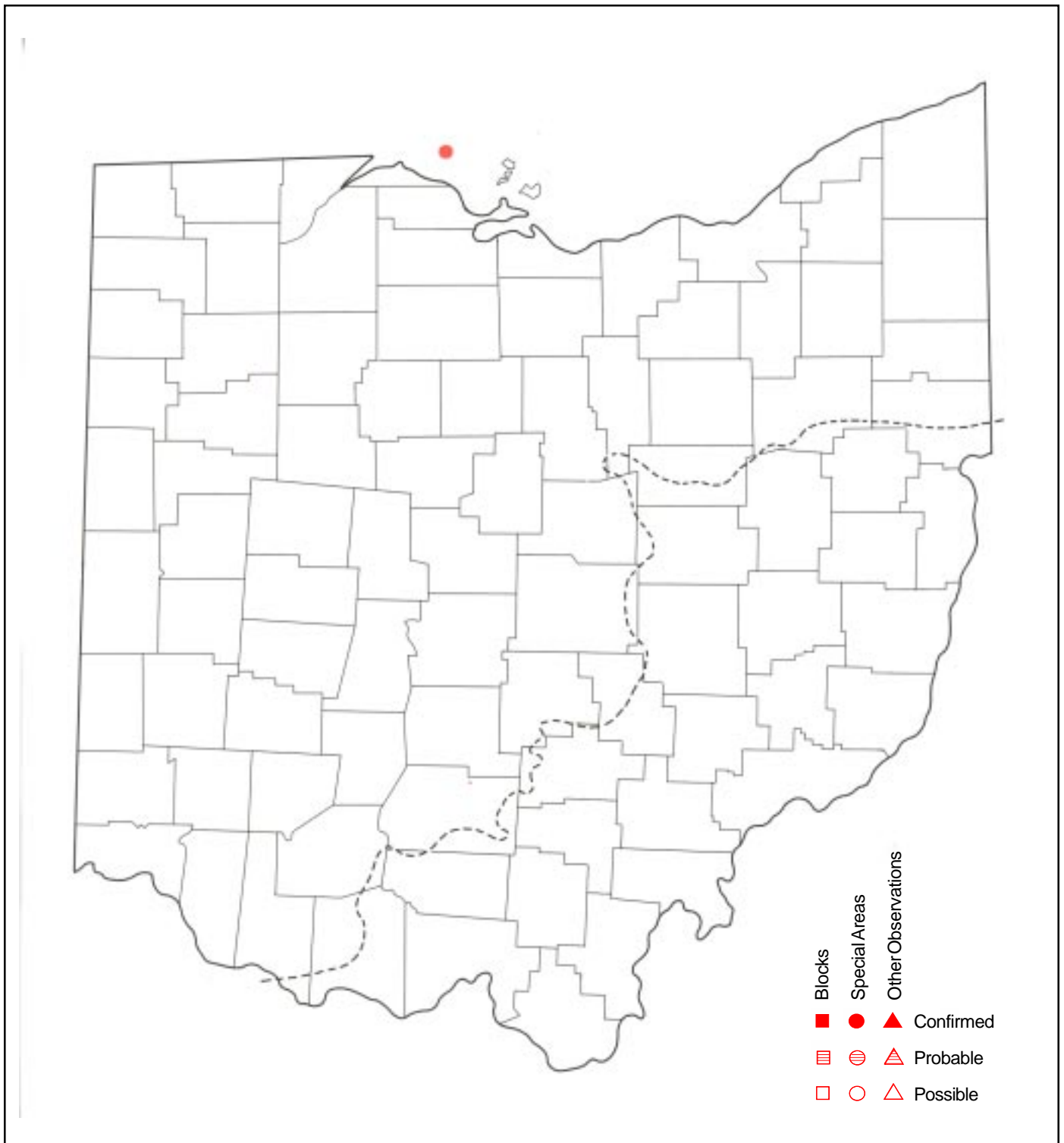
When their presence is not required at the nest, the adult Little Blues forage within the extensive marshes bordering western Lake Erie. These foraging adults are observed infrequently, usually at scattered locations in Ottawa and Lucas counties. They are accidental nonbreeding summer visitors elsewhere in the state (Peterjohn 1989a), and summering Little Blue Herons were unrecorded away from western Lake Erie during the Atlas Project.

The breeding biology and chronology of Little Blue Herons is similar to the closely related Snowy Egret. Little Blues also nest in the middle elevations of mixed heronries, frequently in association with Snowy Egrets, Black-crowned Night-Herons, and other similarly sized herons. Their nests are normally placed in small trees at heights of less than 12 feet. Their breeding chronology is poorly understood within Ohio. Nesting activities are probably initiated during May with most eggs laid before the end of the month. Young Little Blues normally hatch by late June, and remain in the vicinity of the nest for at least one month. They may leave the nesting colony by early August and become fully independent from their parents before the end of the month.

The spread of nesting Little Blues into Ohio reflects a pattern of northward range expansion by this southern heron since the 1940s. This expansion was most noticeable between the 1950s and early 1970s (Andrle and Carroll 1988), but has been largely curtailed after 1980 as a result of their declining breeding populations throughout most of eastern North America (Robbins, C. S., et al. 1986). Breeding Little Blue Herons are currently most numerous along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts north to southern New England, and within the southern United States north to Oklahoma, Arkansas, southeastern Missouri, and southern Illinois (AOU 1983). Only a few isolated colonies have been discovered north of this range. In the midwestern states, a few pairs have sporadically nested in Minnesota (AOU 1983) and regularly in eastern South Dakota (Faanes 1985) and along western Lake Erie in Ohio.



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**Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region**

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	–	–	–	–
Till Plain	271	–	–	–	–
Ill. Till Plain	46	–	–	–	–
Glaciated Plateau	140	–	–	–	–
Unglaciated Plateau	212	–	–	–	–

**Summary of Breeding Status**

	No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded	
<b>Total</b>	–	–
Confirmed	–	–
Probable	–	–
Possible	–	–