

Immature Lesser Black-backed Gull in Carteret County, N.C.

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At 0745 on 26 January 1980 the authors and Ken Knapp located a flock of approximately 500 gulls on a sand flat between Pivers and Radio Islands, near Morehead City, Carteret County, N.C. The birds were seen in excellent light with scopes at a distance of approximately 150 m. LeGrand spotted an immature gull similar in plumage to an immature Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) but felt that it was too small for that species. He alerted the others to the bird, mentioning the possibility of a Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*). Tove and Knapp agreed with LeGrand's first impression. The bird walked next to a group of Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*). It was slightly smaller in body size than the Herring Gulls, but the solid black bill was noticeably shorter and thinner. Tove remarked that the bird suggested an Iceland Gull (*L. glaucoides*) in overall shape, noting particularly the very small bill, small head, and wing tips that extended well beyond the tail. The bird then walked beside an immature Great Black-backed Gull of similar plumage. It was several inches shorter in length than the Great Black-backed and was only one-half to two-thirds the bulk. At this point we referred to European field guides and were convinced that the small bird was a Lesser Black-backed Gull.

At rest the bird had a scaly, sooty brown back and wings (pale margins on the feathers) that were blacker than those of first-winter Herring Gulls. It had whitish underparts and a whitish head lightly streaked with brown. There was also a dark smudge surrounding the eye. The light head and neck contrasted strongly with the dark back. The color of the legs was flesh, but somewhat paler than those of similar-plumaged Great Black-backed Gulls. In flight the bird showed a whitish rump and upper tail and a broad dark tail band. In all respects our bird matched the illustration of the immature Lesser Black-backed Gull in Tuck and Heinzel (1978, *A Field Guide to the Seabirds of Britain and the World*, p. 211), except for the solid black bill. Although the illustration is labeled "first winter," the consensus of field guides checked is that first-winter Lessers are virtually indistinguishable from first-winter Herrings and that the plumage exhibited by our bird was that of a second-winter Lesser. However, the soft parts (bill and legs) resembled those of first-winter Lessers. Will Russell (pers. comm.) has informed us that the description of our bird was that of a first-winter individual, based on his extensive experience with gulls of the North Atlantic. He indicated that the brownish plumage of the Lesser Black-backed Gull, the plumage that most guides list as first winter, is actually the juvenal plumage. This plumage, closely resembling that of similar-aged Herring Gulls, is lost in the late summer or fall, when the contrast between the whitish head and neck and the slaty brown mantle becomes noticeable.

Although there are at least 10 sight records of adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls in North Carolina, all from tidewater areas, this is surprisingly the first report of an immature. We believe that the scarcity of sightings of immatures is partly because the major American field guides do not adequately cover the species, and partly because most observers are not alert to the fact that many immature Lessers are identifiable. We suggest that bird students refer to European field guides to assist them in the identification of all species of gulls on the coast of the Carolinas.

[NOTE: With the acceptance of the Lewis and LeGrand notes on the Lesser Black-backed Gull, the North Carolina Records Committee added the species to the state bird list on the basis of publication of three detailed sight records.—DSL]

Alder Flycatcher Colony in Watauga County, N.C.

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A note on the Alder Flycatcher (*Empidonax alnorum*) reported the status of this bird in the southern Appalachians during the breeding season (Chat 43:35-36). Since that report, the first Tennessee and the southernmost nesting record for this species has been established (Migrant 50:34-36). This note is to record yet another probable nesting site for the Alder Flycatcher in the southern Appalachians.

On 7 June 1979, Eloise Potter, Harry LeGrand, and I found two singing Alder Flycatchers in a mountain bog near the southwestern border of Watauga County, N.C. The bog lies between Beech Mountain and Rocky Knob at an elevation of approximately 4600 feet.

On 6 and 7 June 1980, I returned to the Beech Creek bog and found five singing Alder Flycatchers. They appeared to be on territory because they were fairly evenly dispersed throughout the bog area. Their "pip" call notes and "fee-beer" songs were clearly heard at all hours of the day. Although I remained in the area more than 24 hours, I found no positive evidence of nesting.

BRIEFS FOR THE FILES

HARRY E. LeGRAND JR.

(All dates fall and winter 1979-80; CBC = Christmas Bird Count)

RED-NECKED GREBE: One was studied carefully on the ocean at Pea Island, N.C., on 23 February by Tom and Libbus Haggerty.

EARED GREBE: One seen on Lake Pinehurst in Moore County, N.C., from 19 December to 16 February, was one of the few inland records for the state. It was found by Tom Howard and was later seen by Jay Carter et al. Mark Galizio observed another at Orton Plantation, Brunswick County, N.C., on 1 December.

AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER: One in "partly fresh" condition was found dead at Fort Macon State Park, N.C., on 18 December by John Fussell III.

WHITE PELICAN: One was seen at a pond in Statesville, N.C., from 17 November to 16 December by Sam Cathey et al. Other single individuals were observed at Fort Fisher, New Hanover County, N.C., during most of January and February (Robert Needham et al.), and at Huntington Beach State Park, S.C., on 19 January (Stan and Mary Alford).

GREAT CORMORANT: Jackson Abbott saw three adults at Kiawah Island, S.C., on 8 March, and an adult and an immature there on 9 March.

GANNET: Blizzard conditions in early March were responsible for pushing at least 75 birds into Bogue Sound, N.C., on 2 March, as noted by John Fussell III and Mike Tove.

ANHINGA: A pair was rather far inland in winter at Santee refuge on Lake Marion,