United States and adjacent Canada have black caps that extend below the eyes (Fig. 1B). Conversely, the light-phase birds of the southwestern United States and Mexico have white supercillia and generally more restricted black caps (Fig. 1C), Storer further comments that light birds have thinner stripes down the back of the neck, paler backs, and clearer yellow bills. If seen well, neither form of the Western Grebe should be confused with the Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), which exhibits a slight crest and pronounced black line from eye to bill even in first-winter plumage. The Eurasian species has not been recorded in North America.

Rare Gulls at Cape Hatteras, N.C., Including First Carolina Record of Mew Gull

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On the afternoon of 31 December 1980, we discovered a Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*), six Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*L. fuscus*), and a Mew Gull (*L. canus*) at the large tidal pond at Hatteras point, Dare County, N.C. There is only one previous Carolina record of the Lesser Black-backed Gull in which more than a single bird was seen. The Mew Gull observation constitutes the first record of this species for the Carolinas, and it appears to be the first for the eastern United States south of Baltimore.

[The name Mew Gull, which is generally used in North American publications, is preferred in this article even though the Atlantic population, *L. c. canus*, is referred to as the Common Gull in European field guides.—DSL]

Along the North Carolina coast, the period 25 to 31 December 1980 witnessed continuous sustained winds from the NE and NNE, never falling below 10 mph and reaching gale force on several occasions. The reputation of the Hatteras area as a magnet for storm-tossed birds prompted our visit. There were roughly 40,000 gulls in the area of the big pond, of which about 60% were Ring-billed (*L. delawarensis*), 35% Herring (*L. argentatus*), and 5% Great Black-backed (*L. marinus*). The sky was overcast with the temperature about 40° F. We were equipped with two spotting scopes and a Questar.

The Glaucous Gull was discovered in midafternoon by LeGrand. It was in first-year immature plumage, typical of most birds of this species seen in the Carolinas. This bird was studied leisurely as close as 50 m. Apparently the same bird had been seen there 5 days earlier by Lewis and Allen Bryan.

Soon after arriving at the pond about 1245, Lewis picked out the first Lesser Black-backed. Tove soon noticed two more within 30 m of the first. From the mantle color it was assumed that these birds were members of the British race *L. f. graellsii*. The mantles were dark ash-gray, much darker than in a Ring-billed Gull, yet not at all black, showing obvious contrast with the black wing tips. Lewis, who had observed adult Lesser Black-backeds in North Carolina on three previous occasions (Lewis 1980), remarked that these were the palest he had ever seen. Yet the several adults seen by LeGrand and Tove (LeGrand 1980, LeGrand and Tove 1980) in the Carolinas and Virginia had mantles much the same shade as these. All three of the birds showed

extensive gray streaking around the eye and on the crown and nape. One of the birds was adult/fourth winter (bill yellow with red gonyal spot), another seemed to be in its third winter (bill yellow with black subterminal mark), and the third appeared to be in its second winter (some brown on the wing coverts, bill mostly dark). This third bird had grayish legs, whereas the others had yellow legs. All were a little smaller than a Herring Gull. Later in the afternoon, we found three more of these gulls elsewhere on the pond, all third winter or adult/fourth winter. Curiously, one of these latter birds, an adult/fourth winter, had an almost no streaking on its head. See Grant (1980) for information on identification of Lesser Black-backeds.

Soon after the sighting of the first three Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Lewis observed a bird about 70 m away, which we assumed at first to be an adult Lesser Black-backed. Lewis was the first to realize that the bird could not be a Lesser Black-backed because of its bill and size. We studied the bird for the next half hour as it stood and swam next to Ring-billed Gulls.

We observed a small, fully adult, winter-plumaged gull with a fairly dark mantle. The mantle color was midway between that of the Lesser Black-backeds and the nearby Ring-billeds, close to the shade of a Franklin's Gull (*L. pipixcan*). In overall size or bulk, the bird seemed identical to a Ring-billed Gull. The bird's head had the overall shape of a Ring-billed's. The leg color was greenish-yellow. The nape, crown, the lower nape area was so streaked as to give a collared effect. The folded wings showed four prominent white "mirrors" in the otherwise black wing tips, and were long enough to give the bird a tapered look. The eye was dark, but showed contrast between the black pupil and the surrounding iris. Lacking bright sunlight, we were unable to determine the iris color precisely; however, we believe that it was brownish or grayish. Gray smudgings around the front half of the eye gave the bird a "mean" look.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the gull was its bill. In size and shape it resembled a Ring-billed's, but with several significant differences. It was a little thinner and did not have a gonyal bulge. The tip of the upper mandible tapered gently, quite unlike the rounded tip of the Ring-billed. Most strikingly, the bill was uniformly greenish-yellow, with no red or black marks whatsoever.

The species *Larus canus* is common and widespread from western Europe across the whole of Siberia and into Alaska and the northwestern United States. The bird that is depicted in the various North American field guides is, naturally, the breeding race *L. c. brachyrhynchus* (Mew Gull). However, the birds that wander occasionally to the eastern United States are of the nominate western European race *L. c. canus* (Common Gull). The difference is significant, because birds of the two races differ noticeably. Common Gulls average only slightly smaller than Ring-billeds. Grant (1979) shows that there is much overlap in size. Mew Gulls average smaller and have dome- or dove-shaped heads and small, dainty bills. Common Gulls on the other hand, have somewhat larger bills and more flattened heads, more like those of Ring-billed Gulls. In fact, there is some evidence (Dan Gibson, pers. comm.) that these forms may not be conspecific. Our bird looked very much like those illustrated in Grant (1979), particularly like the individual shown in plate 50, page 151. Lewis and LeGrand, who had never before seen any *L. canus,* did not immediately recognize our bird because their subconscious preconception was of the Pacific Mew Gull rather than the Atlantic Common Gull. People who look for adult Common Gulls in the eastern United States are also cautioned not to look for "Ring-billeds without the ring." With their extensive head and neck streaking and dark mantle, adult Common Gulls resemble Lesser Black-backed Gulls more closely than they do Ring-billed Gulls.

Immature Common/Mew Gulls are virtually inseparable from immature Ring-billed Gulls, at least under most field conditions. For further information, refer to the article by Lauro and Spencer (1980). Soon after publication of their article, several reports of immature *L. canus* in the East were retracted.

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Rat Snake Preys on Nestlings of Rough-winged Swallow and Common Grackle

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Though snake predation of various swallow species and other birds is not unknown (Bent 1942, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 179:424-433; Condor 79:509; Living Bird 15:33-41; Murrelet 61:35-36; Wilson Bull. 91:135-137), few snake predation records have been noted from North Carolina.

At 1830 on 14 May 1980 in Bertie County, N.C., I examined a hole that was horizontally eliptical and was dug out of a sandy clay bank that had a slope of approximately 50 degrees. The hole was approximately 55 cm from the top of the bank and 2.5 m from the base. With the help of a pine root, I pulled myself up to the entrance, which had a vertical measurement of 5.5 cm and a horizontal measurement of 12.5 cm. The depth of the hole was 67 cm. A nest of pine needles was barely visible, but the hole was too dark for me to see eggs or young. Because adult Rough-winged Swallows (*Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*) were seen entering the hole, I assumed that the hole was being used for nesting.

At 1900 on 16 May, I returned to the nest hole and with the aid of a flashlight I found a Rat Snake (*Elaphe obsoletta*) curled up in it. After considerable effort, I extracted from the hole a snake approximately 120 cm in length. Its sides were evidently swollen. With firm downward massaging along its vertically held body, I forced the snake to regurgitate its stomach contents. The stomach remains were recognizable: five Rough-winged Swallow nestlings, one Rough-winged Swallow egg and two Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) nestlings. The Rough-winged Swallow nestlings had a trace of down on the back and head and measured between 35 mm and 40 mm in length. The Rough-winged Swallow egg measured 17 x 11 mm and was cracked along its length and width. No visible signs of digestion were seen on the Rough-winged Swallow nestlings or egg. The Common Grackle nestlings measured approximately 108 mm in length and emerging feather sheaths could be seen along the feather tracts. The abdomen of one grackle nestling appeared to be slightly digested, for some of its internal organs were exposed. The eyes of all seven nestlings were still unopened.

Identification of the snake's stomach contents was confirmed by David Lee of the North Carolina State Museum. The snake was released near the point of capture.