General Field Notes

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Common Terns Foraging Over Land

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On various occasions on 5, 6, and 7 May 1981, we observed Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) foraging over sparsely vegetated road shoulders on Bodie and Pea Islands, Dare County, N.C. Individual birds and groups of two to five terns were seen hunting along the main road (NC 12) that runs the length of the islands. To the best of our knowledge there are no reported instances of this species feeding over non-aquatic habitats, although it is a well-known behavior in Forster's (*S. forsteri*), Gull-billed (*Gelochelidon nilotica*), and Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*).

The birds flew parallel to the road, into the wind, at an altitude of about 3 to 4 m and swooped down on potential prey. The terns were observed snatching food from the ground with their bills, but the prey items must have been small because we could not see them. After catching food the birds returned to their original altitude, without landing, and continued to patrol the road shoulder. Based on the number of feeding swoops, the prey items must have been quite abundant, and we surmize that they were newly emerging Orthopterans. Wax Myrtle (*Myrica* sp.) an other woody shrubs lined the road shoulders, so the birds confined their hunting to a rather narrow zone.

Although this seems like aberrant feeding behavior for a plunge-diving, surface-feeding tern, Lee observed this same behavior once before on Assateague Island, Worcester County, Maryland, in May 1974. A single bird was feeding over the open inner dune area near the north end of the island. In all cases the nearby waters were not so rough as to prohibit the birds from feeding in their conventional manner. It is not known if the individuals observed were breeding residents or spring migrants. In North Carolina and Maryland, Common Tern migration continues at least until the last week in May and local nesting is under way by the second week of the month. This is publication 1981-9 of the North Carolina Biological Survey.

A Dark-phase Western Grebe from North Carolina

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On 28 February 1981, I observed a dark-phase Western Grebe (*Aechmorphorus occidentalis*) on Pamlico Sound near the Swan Quarter ferry landing in Hyde County, N.C. The bird was first seen about 0800 as it swam in the vicinity of a Double-crested

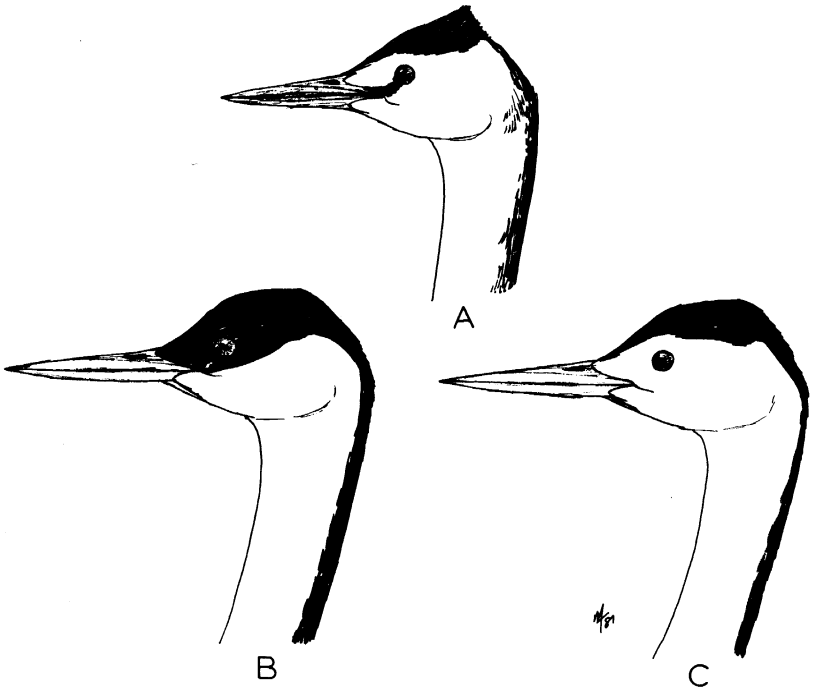

Fig. 1. (A) First-winter Great Crested Grebe, a species not recorded from North America. (B) Winter-plumaged dark-phase Western Grebe of the northwestern United States and adjacent Canada. (C) Winter-plumaged light-phase Western Grebe of the southwestern United States and Mexico. (Drawings by the author)

Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*). The two birds were of comparable size, but the grebe's neck was a little thinner and held straighter. The grebe's head and neck were immaculate white except for a coal-black crown, which extended below the eye (Fig. 1B), and a black stripe down the back of the neck. Most striking, however, was the very long and narrow straw-colored bill. Steve Graves and I observed the bird for nearly 30 minutes. Although the grebe was a considerable distance from us, nearly perfect lighting and an 80X Questar provided an opportunity for excellent study.

There are two distinct color morphs of the Western Grebe, which in fact were initially considered separate species but were treated as one species in the 1886 A.O.U. *Checklist* and all subsequent editions (see Storer 1965, Living Bird 4:59-63). Recently, compelling evidence indicates that these morphs behave as distinct species (Ratti, 1979, Auk 96:573-586). Although there are six previous records of Western Grebe for North Carolina (Chat 35:27-29; 41:36,38), the present one appears to be the first in which the color phase has been described.

Both forms of the Western Grebe have coal-black caps without distinct crests; both also have pale yellow bills (Storer 1965). The dark-phase birds of the northwestern

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