

Second Record of Mew Gull for North Carolina

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In late December 1983, a large Menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*) kill and cold weather to the north resulted in an unusually large concentration of gulls in the vicinity of Hatteras Inlet, Dare County, N.C. On the afternoon of 27 December, I checked birds gathered on the sand flats at the Ocracoke side of Hatteras Inlet.

In scanning through a dense collection of standing Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*), I noticed a strikingly different bird and studied it for the next 10 minutes with my 80X Questar telescope. The bird was standing about 100 to 150 yards away. Visibility was excellent.

I was attracted to the bird by its very dark plumage. Resembling a first-winter Ring-billed Gull, the bird differed from that species in the uniformly chocolate brown wings. Each feather on the wing coverts was almost entirely brown, with only a narrow white edge. In comparison, the paler brown feathers of a Ring-billed of this age show much white around the edges and thus produce a mottled or "contrasty" effect. The brown color extended over most of the mantle, where it blended with a dark gray, apparently a darker gray than that of a Ring-billed Gull. The primaries were blackish brown.

The head was small and rounded, and was very profusely and darkly mottled with the same brown color over the nape, sides, and crown. It was whitish only towards the front. Pale at the base and dark at the tip, the bill was extremely short and thin, relative to that of all the nearby Ring-billeds.

The underparts were, again, strikingly dark and brownish. Whereas most first-year Ring-billeds are white flecked with brown on the breast, belly, and flanks, this bird was brown flecked with white. Toward the vent and under-tail coverts the color was whiter, but still streaked with brown. In coloration the bird gave much the same impression as a first-winter Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*). The deep brown color was not a result of oil, for the bird's plumage was neat and fresh.

In overall size the bird was slightly smaller than most of the surrounding Ring-billed Gulls. It also seemed to have shorter legs. I cannot comment on the tail or rump coloration because I lost sight of the bird when the entire group took flight.

My immediate thought was that the bird was a first-year Mew Gull (*L. canus*). Certainly it had the right size, shape, and head profile for that species. Having never before seen a first-winter bird of this species, I was confused initially because this individual did not match my conception of a first-winter Mew Gull. This is perhaps because subspecies vary in plumage.

Larus canus breeds over most of the Arctic, missing only central and eastern North America. The western North American race, *L. c. brachyrhynchus*, differs significantly from the nominate race, *L. c. canus* (the Common Gull of Europe), especially in first-winter plumage.

Briefly summarizing the excellent article by Lauro and Spencer (1980), first-winter Common Gulls are less streaked below than Ring-billed Gulls, and have more uniform and paler brown wing coverts. However, first-winter Mew Gulls from our West, com-

pared to Ring-billed, have darker brown wing coverts and are darker below. All *L. canus* are slightly smaller than Ring-billed and have short, dainty bills, with the Western race being the smallest. But bill size alone does not separate the species: Small female Ring-billed can have small bills.

In overall coloration, from darkest to lightest, the sequence is Mew Gull (*L. C. brachyrhynchus*), Ring-billed Gull, and Common Gull (*L. c. canus*). For more information, consult the article by Lauro and Spencer. The bird I observed is very similar to the bottom bird in Figure 5 of that article, or to the top right bird of Figure 12. It is also well represented by Plate 61, number 213e, of Harrison (1983).

This constitutes the second sight record of *L. canus* for North Carolina. The first occurred in December 1980 (Lewis et al. 1981).

LITERATURE CITED

- Lauro, A., and B. Spencer. 1980. A method for separating juvenile and first winter Ring-billed Gulls and Common Gulls. *American Birds* 34:111-117.
- Harrison, P. 1983. *Seabirds, an Identification Guide*. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston.
- Lewis, R. H., M. Tove, and H.E. LeGrand Jr. 1981. Rare gulls at Cape Hatteras, N.C., including first Carolina record of Mew Gull. *Chat* 45:75-77.

NEW GENERAL FIELD NOTES EDITOR

E. Wayne Irvin will succeed David S. Lee as General Field Notes Editor for North Carolina, effective with the Winter 1985 issue of *The Chat*. Dr. Irvin is a dentist by profession, but he has wide experience as a nature photographer, taxidermist, and ornithologist. Dr. Irvin is particularly interested in pelagic birds. His wife, Fran, is Headquarters Secretary for Carolina Bird Club. Dr. Irvin's mailing address is in care of the North Carolina State Museum of Natural History, P.O. Box 27647, Raleigh, N.C. 27611.

After more than 4 years of editing field notes, Mr. Lee has given up his position on the staff of *The Chat* in order to have more time for field research and preparation of papers for publication. His interests include the birdlife of North Carolina's offshore waters, pocosins, and mountains, particularly Grandfather Mountain. As Curator of Birds at the North Carolina State Museum of Natural History, Mr. Lee will work closely with the present editors and serve as chairman of the North Carolina Records Committee for CBC. As Chief of the North Carolina Biological Survey, he will continue preparing a publication on the distribution of the breeding birds of the state.

CORRECTION

CBC Rare Bird Alert Phone Number

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