

# General Field Notes

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## Two Records of the Franklin's Gull for North Carolina

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At approximately 1500 on 8 October 1983, William Hunter spotted a gull resting with a flock of adult winter-plumaged Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) at the large tidal pond at Cape Hatteras, Dare County, N.C. Though the bird was sitting and had its head tucked, the very dark area on the back of the head and nape was noticeable. The brown upper wing coverts indicated that the age of the bird was probably first-year. With a partial black hood, the bird could not have been a Laughing Gull; it was identified as a first-winter Franklin's Gull (*L. pipixcan*). This identification was agreed upon by other observers, including Wayne Klockner and Hal Wierenga. The bird was studied under excellent lighting conditions, as closely as 20 m through 20X scopes and 10X binoculars. (Wierenga has submitted extensive notes of this observation to the senior author, who has given a copy to the N.C. State Museum of Natural History for additional documentation.)

The following field marks of the Franklin's Gull were compared with those of nearby adult and first-winter Laughing Gulls. The bird was smaller in size, and its black bill was shorter, straighter, and narrower than the Laughing Gulls' bills. The back of the head was black, the hind neck and the forehead were white, and a partial eye ring was white and contrasted strongly with the black nape and crown. The mantle and scapulars were gray, similar to those of the adult Laughing Gulls. The upper wing coverts were brown-tipped. The sides of the throat and sides of the upper breast were light dingy gray, and the rest of the underparts were white. The legs were black. When the bird was flushed, it was more reluctant to fly than the surrounding Laughing Gulls, which took off immediately. Flushing confirmed that the tail had a complete black subterminal band, except for solid white outer rectrices. The under wing coverts were noticeably white, and in flight the upper wing coverts were brown-gray with primaries and secondaries dark brown or black.

On the morning of 31 March 1984, Harry LeGrand observed a "black-hooded" gull at Greenview Farm just south of Raleigh, N.C. It, along with approximately 10 Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*), was standing on the ground, presumably feeding on insects in a closely grazed pasture. LeGrand was able to approach within 50 m and observed the following marks: a blackish hood with wide white "eyebrows," a fairly slender sooty-red bill, a medium gray back followed by a white and a black band near the wing tip, and dusky legs. When the bird flushed, the wings showed the white band on the primaries that separated the gray mantle from the black near the tips of the primaries. Other features that distinguished this Franklin's Gull from the somewhat similar Laughing Gull were the moderately short wings with rounded tips and a body size noticeably smaller than that of the Ring-billed Gulls.

The second gull was independently discovered several hours later by Jim Mulholland, who also identified it as a Franklin's Gull. At least a half-dozen other birders saw it later in the day and early the following day (1 April), but it was not seen thereafter.

The occurrence of the immature Franklin's Gull was apparently not related to any unusual weather features. However, the adult bird was likely brought to North Carolina by an unusually strong spring storm system. This system moved east from the southern Great Plains and passed through the Carolinas on 28 March 1984, bringing heavy rain and spawning many tornadoes.

These represent only the second and third known records of the Franklin's Gull for North Carolina. The first record is for an immature bird collected on the Catawba River near Charlotte on 13 October 1952 (Chat 17:23-24). It is likely that Franklin's Gulls are not nearly so rare in the state as the three records indicate. A few of these gulls, particularly immatures, could occur each fall on the coast and be easily overlooked among the ubiquitous Laughing Gulls. However, an inland Franklin's Gull is much less likely to be passed over as a Laughing Gull because of the latter's rarity away from tidewater areas.

## **Horned Larks as Breeding Birds in the Sandhills of North Carolina**

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To contemplate the idea of Horned Larks (*Eremophila alpestris*) as summer residents of the Sandhills of North Carolina consumes positive effort. Nonetheless, Greg Dearing, a local nature enthusiast, informed me that he and his brother, James Dearing, had found them on the Fort Bragg Military Reservation about the middle of July. The birds were seen along a dirt runway on the Saint Mere Eglise Drop Zone.

Permission was obtained to visit the site, and my first sighting occurred on 21 July 1982. I was accompanied by Terry Myers, who is a Wildlife Biologist with the Fort Bragg Wildlife Branch of the Directorate of Engineering and Housing. In about an hour we saw 25 to 27 Horned Larks, including perhaps five males and two or three females. The rest appeared to be immature birds. Several observations were made of adults feeding immature birds.