

General Field Notes

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Reexamination of Pre-1970 Nest Records of the Caspian Tern from South Carolina and Georgia

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Some oologists stated that Caspian Terns (*Sterna caspia*) nested in coastal South Carolina before 1970, the year in which breeding was first confirmed (McDaniel and Beckett 1971). Based on unpublished oological information, Johnston (1989) claimed that the Caspian Tern also nested in coastal Georgia. The purpose of this note is to reexamine pre-1970 nest records of the Caspian Tern from South Carolina and Georgia.

South Carolina.—H. L. Harllee misidentified six Royal Tern (*S. maxima*) egg sets collected in 1933 at Beaufort County as Caspian Tern eggs (WFVZ; L. Kiff, in litt.; eggs examined by Kiff).

H. Arden Edwards reported collecting a fresh clutch of two eggs at Buzzard's Island (county not identified), 4 May 1911. The eggs are those of the Caspian Tern (WFVZ; L. Kiff, in litt.). It appears to be the only egg set purportedly collected by Edwards in South Carolina. Four localities identified as "Buzzard Island" lack suitable nesting habitat for Caspian Terns. The original set mark is 6/2, while the set mark on the data slip is 436/2. Edwards probably falsified data by using sets taken by other collectors and making up his own data slips for them (L. Kiff, in litt.); it is unlikely that he ever visited South Carolina.

D. H. Johnson reported collecting a fresh clutch of three eggs for Ed J. Court at "Gull Flats" (county not identified) on 26 May 1906. The eggs are

those of the Caspian Tern (WFVZ: L. Kiff, in litt.). The clutch size is large for a Caspian Tern egg set in the southern United States (Clapp et al. 1983). Ed Court on occasion innocently accepted egg set data collected by a second party for him. These were usually for rarer species and some were apparently either misidentified or had incorrect data slips (McNair unpubl.; L. Kiff, pers. comm.).

A Captain Roberts collected a set of two eggs at Bull's Bay on 26 June 1905 (ROM). The eggs are those of the Caspian Tern (R. D. James, in litt.). On the same day, Roberts collected one clutch of Royal Tern eggs, the only other egg set collected by him in South Carolina. A. A. Wood of Ontario purchased both egg sets from Roberts. The information on nest site choice on the Caspian Tern egg data slip agrees with that from other areas: in North Carolina they nest on the edge of Royal Tern colonies (Parnell and Soots 1976). An A. T. Roberts collected five egg sets of the Royal Tern for M. T. Cleckley at Bull's Island on 1 June 1895. The eggs are those of Royal Terns (WFVZ; L. Kiff, pers. comm.), but this species has never nested at Bull's Island. Four clutches are of three eggs and the remaining clutch is of four eggs, which is highly unlikely. However, the relationship of Captain Roberts to A. T. Roberts is unknown, and thus the suspect data for the Royal Tern cannot be logically attributed to data for the Caspian Tern.

Georgia.—The only egg set of the Caspian Tern purportedly collected in Georgia was taken by J. E. Gould at Little St. Simons Island on 10 July 1900 (Johnston 1989). However, that single egg has been reidentified as an egg of the Royal Tern (Ch. M.; pers. exam.).

Conclusion.—All pre-1970 records of the Caspian Tern from the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, except for one unconfirmed record at Bull's Bay, South Carolina in 1905, are probably invalid. Considering all available information about oological collecting activities of Caspian Tern egg sets during this period, I do not believe that the validity of the Caspian Tern egg set collected by Captain Roberts has been resolved. The only unquestionably authentic breeding records I know of from Georgia or South Carolina were at Cape Island, Cape Romain NWR, South Carolina from 1970–74 (McDaniel and Beckett 1971; see McNair and Post 1993). These confirmed nests of Caspian Tern were located within Gull-billed Tern (*S. nilotica*) and Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*) colonies.

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Evasive Maneuvers of Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*)

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On 30 August 1992, H. Fenton Day III and I observed a group of 25 distant birds soaring at heights 50-80 meters over the ocean, near "the Point" (35° 33' N, 74° 53' W), east-southeast of Oregon Inlet, North Carolina. From a distance of roughly a half-kilometer, the birds seemed to be gulls soaring together in a tight, ascending column. The time of initial observation was 1245 EDT; it was a hot day with moderate winds (5-10 knots), with good conditions for the formation of thermals over the Gulf Stream, and soaring gulls, if a little out of place, seemed plausible.

As the *Country Girl* neared the birds, it became apparent that they were Black-capped Petrels, with white collars and rumps visible on some of the lower birds. What had seemed lazy spirals in the air from a distance became rapid, precision-climbing from a closer vantage of 150 meters. The reason for this behavior also became apparent: an intermediate-morph South Polar Skua (*Catharacta maccormicki*) had begun a series of upward sallies at the lower petrels. Presumably this bird, possibly the same individual reported for several weeks in this vicinity (Allan Foreman, pers. comm.), was the cause of this unusual flight behavior in the petrels. The skua made five upward passes at the petrels without any apparent gain; the petrels simply ascended too rapidly for the skua. In one instance, the skua reached a petrel from below, perhaps 50 meters above the ocean. The petrel simply folded its wings in a drop resembling the stoop of a large falcon and returned to the locomotion more typical of a gadfly petrel after pulling out of the drop virtually instantaneously. The skua was left behind. At no time did the petrels exhibit aggressive behavior, such as mobbing, toward the skua.

It is not immediately obvious why a skua would harass a *Pterodroma* petrel: such behavior may be kleptoparasitic or predatory. In addition to predation on birds in their size class, skuas have been known to kill procellariids that did not disgorge (Furness 1987); predatory behavior cannot be ruled out in this case. On 14 August 1993, within a km of the present sighting, Alan Brady photographed an intermediate-morph South Polar Skua eating a Black-capped Petrel. It was not clear whether the skua had killed the petrel or whether the petrel was already dead.

My limited experience with Great (*C. skua*) and South Polar Skuas suggests that kleptoparasitic attacks are mounted most frequently from *above*, with