

# General Field Notes

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### Mew Gull at Cape Hatteras, North Carolina

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At 0715 h on 19 February 1993 we observed an adult Mew Gull (*Larus canus canus*) at Cape Hatteras Point, Dare County. Nance initially spotted a smaller, darker-mantled gull with a dark eye resting with Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) which we quickly recognized as a Mew Gull. We spent the next fifteen minutes observing and photographing the bird at close range. At 0730 h the bird flew a short distance, landed in another gull flock, and was not seen again.

Initially, the most striking features of this bird were the smaller size, slightly darker mantle and upperwing, dark eye, and especially the bill shape and pattern. The bird was in a large flock of gulls near the tip of Cape Hatteras. The majority of the gulls were Ring-billed Gulls, though there were also numerous Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) and Great Black-backed Gulls (*L. marinus*) present. The bird was slightly smaller than a Ring-billed Gull, and in general appeared slimmer and longer-winged. The bill was much slimmer and shorter than the bill of a Ring-billed Gull under direct comparison. We estimated the bill was 50% shorter than the bill of a Ring-billed, and not much more than half as thick. The bill color was more greenish than that of adjacent adult Ring-billed Gulls. There was a darker, very thin subterminal ring on the bill which appeared brown. Also, the bill appeared more pointed than the bill of a Ring-billed Gull. The bird was distinctly smaller-headed than nearby Ring-billed Gulls. The head was mostly white with a light gray wash on the rear

portion of the crown and some faint brown streaking across the nape. There was also a dark gray smudge anterior to, and touching the eye. When compared to Ring-billed Gulls, the eye appeared large relative to the size of the head. The eye was dark-colored, with no hint of yellow in the iris. The underparts were white. The Mantle, scapulars, and upperwing were dark gray, a shade darker than the mantle of a Ring-billed or Herring Gull. When perched, the white color on the tertials was more extensive than those of a Ring-billed Gull. Small white tips to the outer primaries, as well as a large white mirror on the outermost primary, were also visible when the bird was perched. The legs were a dull yellow-green, noticeably duller than the legs of nearby Ring-billed Gulls. The tail was white. During our brief view of the bird in flight we noted a lack of extensive white color in the wing tip. Large white mirrors near the tips of the outer two primaries were visible as were smaller white tips to the next four or five primaries. There was no white color separating the black bases of the primaries from the otherwise gray upperwing. There was a clear white trailing edge to the wing, extending outward to at least the innermost primaries. The pattern of the underwing was not studied. We aged the bird as an adult Mew Gull in basic plumage on the basis of the wing pattern, leg and bill color, and lack of any markings on the tail.

The identification of this bird to subspecies was based almost entirely on wing pattern. White color in the primaries was restricted to large mirrors near the tips of the outermost two primaries, and smaller white tips to the next four or five primaries. This pattern is consistent with *L. c. canus*. The North American subspecies *L. c. brachyrhynchus* has much more white in the primaries, especially the white area dividing the black primaries (numbers three to five according to Grant) from the grayer upperwing, and less black in the wing tip. Other points which favor *L. c. canus*, but which are not by themselves definitive, are the dark subterminal ring on the bill and the dark iris.

This represents the third record of a Mew Gull in North Carolina. The previous two records were also from the Outer Banks: 31 December 1980 at Cape Hatteras Point, Dare County (Lewis, et al. 1981) and 27 December 1983 at Hatteras Inlet, Dare County (Lewis 1984). The 1980 bird was an adult *canus* while the 1983 bird was apparently a first-winter *brachyrhynchus*. Most records of vagrant Mew Gulls on the Atlantic Coast are of the European subspecies *L. c. canus* (American Ornithologists' Union 1983).

#### LITERATURE CITED

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