

General Field Notes

General Field Notes briefly report such items as rare sightings, unusual behaviors, significant nesting records, or summaries of such items.

First, second, or third sightings of species in either state must be submitted to the appropriate Bird Records Committee prior to publication in The Chat.

First Record of California Gull (*Larus californicus*) for South Carolina

Christopher E. Hill

*Biology Department, Coastal Carolina University,
PO Box 261954, Conway, SC 29528, chill@coastal.edu*

On 5 January 2010 I visited the Horry County landfill, off Route 90, east of Conway, South Carolina. While looking through a group of Ring-billed (*Larus delawarensis*), Laughing (*L. atricilla*), and Herring (*L. argentatus*) Gulls, I noticed a gull, larger than the Ring-billed Gulls around it, but smaller than a Herring Gull. I also noted a red and black spot on its long bill, its gray-green legs, and dark eyes. The wings were relatively long, pointed, and with a “tail-dragging” aspect. Its mantle was darker than those of nearby Ring-bills. These characteristics led me to conclude that I was looking at a California Gull (*Larus californicus*). Other diagnostic characteristics were: 1) tertial and scapular crescents more conspicuous than those of nearby Ring-bills; 2) a reddish orbital ring; 3) head mottling similar in extent, but browner and softer than the crisp gray markings of nearby Ring-bills.

I observed the bird through 8x binoculars and a 20x spotting scope from a distance of 10–15 m. I obtained photographs with a Canon G10 digital camera (Fig. 1). On a subsequent visit, Lex Glover and I noted and photographed the conspicuously large subapical white spots on its black primaries, features indicating it was an adult.

The variability of large gulls is almost limitless, and the possibility of hybridization cannot be discounted; however, this individual displayed a wide range of traits, enumerated above, which are consistent with its identification as a California Gull. The landfill, near the northeastern corner of SC, may attract as many as 20,000 gulls, including rarer birds such as Iceland (*Larus glaucoides*) and Glaucous (*L. hyperboreus*) Gulls. The landfill is a logical place for a California Gull to appear.

The present report was reviewed by the SC Bird Records Committee (report # 01-10-01) and accepted as valid (D. Slyce, pers. comm.). With the verification of this record, 14 species of gulls have been documented for

South Carolina. Another California Gull for the state was reported from the Jasper County landfill in January 2004. Three separate reports of the occurrence were submitted to the South Carolina Bird Records Committee (Reports 01-04-01a-c; Slyce et al. 2005); no decision regarding these submissions has been made.

Georgia has two accepted records of the California Gull, a sight record made in February 2006, and a photograph obtained in January 2007 (G. Beaton, Jr., pers. comm.). North Carolina's first California Gull was documented in 1993 (Dinsmore et al. 1995); since then, one or two individuals have been seen on the coast each winter. Other rare species such as Thayer's (*L. thayeri*) and Slaty-backed Gulls (*L. schistisagus*) have been recorded in North Carolina and may occur in South Carolina in the future.



Figure 1. California Gull with Ring-billed and Laughing Gulls 5 January 2010, Conway, SC. Photo by Chris Hill.

Literature Cited

- Dinsmore, S. J., J. O. Fussell, and J. Nance. 1995. First record of California Gull for North Carolina. *Chat* 59:67–68.
- Slyce, D. J., G. Beaton, Jr., L. Glover, T. Kalbach, T. Piephoff, W. Post, and S. Wagner. 2005. 2004 Annual report of the South Carolina Bird Records Committee. *Chat* 69:35–37.