

FIRST RECORD OF LARGE-BILLED TERN (*PHAETUSA SIMPLEX*) FOR GRENADA AND THE LESSER ANTILLES

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Abstract: We observed and photographed a Large-billed Tern (*Phaetusa simplex*) at Grenadian by Rex Resorts, Point Salines, Grenada, on 31 May 31 and 1 June 2010, providing the first record for Grenada and the Lesser Antilles. This represents the 11th record north of Panama and coastal South America. All northern records occurred between 10 March and 25 July.

Key words: distributional record, Grenada, Large-billed Tern, *Phaetusa simplex*

Resumen: PRIMER REGISTRO DE LA GAVIOTA DE PICO GRANDE (*PHAETUSA SIMPLEX*) EN GRENADA Y LAS ANTILLAS MENORES. Se observó y fotografió una Gaviota de Pico Grande (*Phaetusa simplex*) en Rex Resorts, Point Salines, Granada, el 31 de mayo y el 1 de junio de 2010, lo cual representó el primer registro para este país y para las Antillas Menores. Este, a su vez, representa el oncenavo registro al norte de Panamá y de las costas de Suramérica. Todos los registros norteños han sucedido entre el 10 de marzo y el 25 de julio.

Palabras clave: registro de distribución, Granada, Gaviota de Pico Grande, *Phaetusa simplex*

Résumé : PREMIERE DONNEE DE STERNE A GROS BEC (*PHAETUSA SIMPLEX*) POUR LA GRENAD E ET LES PETITES ANTILLES. Nous avons observé et photographié une Sterne à gros bec (*Phaetusa simplex*) à Grenadian by Rex Resorts, Point Salines, Grenade, le 31 mai et le 1er juin 2010. Cela constitue la première donnée relative à l'espèce à la Grenade et aux Petites Antilles et représente la 11ème donnée au nord de Panama et de la côte sud-américaine. Toutes les observations septentrionales ont été faites entre le 10 mars et le 25 juillet.

Mots clés : donnée de répartition, Grenade, *Phaetusa simplex*, Sterne à gros bec

About noon on 31 May 2010, we were birding around the ponds at Grenadian by Rex Resorts, on the southwest peninsula of Grenada. These are three small, interconnected freshwater ponds, each with a small island, located just behind the beach. Upon our arrival we saw two Laughing Gulls (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) and a tern, about the same size as the gulls, flying back and forth over the pond. The tern had a striking upperwing pattern. From the bend in the wing to the tip it was black. The inner wing was divided by a diagonal line running from the rear base of the wing to the front of the wing just short of the bend. The area anterior to the diagonal was gray and the posterior area was white. The white reached the leading edge of the wing in a short area separating the gray and black areas at the bend. The underwing was white but the upperwing pattern showed through when seen against the bright sky. The tern's back and tail were gray, matching the inner part of the wing. The underparts were white. The tail was short and deeply notched. The bill, legs, and feet were yellow. The bill was shaped like a Royal Tern's (*Thalasseus maximus*) but notably larger. Black patches above the eyes extended back over the head. The crown

was white from the forehead to the nape.

We watched the tern for about an hour except for a quick trip to pick up a camera. Jeremiah took several photos of the bird in flight, challenged by the bird flying almost non-stop against the midday sky. He returned to the site later in the afternoon, but the bird was no longer there. However, it was there when he returned the next morning (1 June), when he took more photos including some of the tern standing on one of the small islands (Figs. 1–2). The tern was not seen again after 1 June.

On both days the tern spent most of its time patrolling over the ponds looking down, hunting for food. We did not see it patrol over the ocean, which was only about 100 m away. We never observed it dive, suggesting that the ponds did not contain any appropriate food. The absence of an appropriate food source would explain the tern's departure from the pond shortly after the observations. On 1 June, Laughing Gulls and a Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) harassed the tern when it approached too closely, perhaps providing further incentive for the tern to depart.

We tentatively identified the bird as a Large-billed Tern (*Phaetusa simplex*), based on its wing



Fig. 1. Large-billed Tern (*Phaetusa simplex*) at Grenadian by Rex Resorts, south coast of Grenada, on 31 May (left) and 1 June (right) 2010. Photos by Anthony Jeremiah.

pattern, but White had only seen the species once in Trinidad 15 yr earlier and was uncertain whether the bill and leg color was correct for the species. Jeremiah had a Trinidad and Tobago field guide (Kenefick *et al.* 2007). in his car and we were able to confirm the identification as a basic-plumaged adult Large-billed Tern.

The Large-billed Tern is mainly a sedentary resident of freshwater habitats in South America, where it resides east of the Andes and south to central Argentina (Restall *et al.* 2006). It formerly bred in western Ecuador but that population is now extirpated (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001). In Central America it occurs rarely but regularly in Panama (Angehr and Dean 2010) and has strayed as far north as Costa Rica (10–15 March 2002, 15 March 2003, 13 June 2007; Jones 2002, Sandoval *et al.* 2010) and Honduras (28 April 2002; Jones 2002). On islands off the coast of Venezuela, there is one specimen record from Aruba (12 May 1908; Prins *et al.* 2009) and it occurs regularly on Margarita Island (Hilty 2003) and Trinidad (Kenefick *et al.* 2007). There are two records from Cuba (undated, 28 May 1910; Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000) and a report from

Bermuda (14 June 1961; Wingate 1973, A. Dobson pers. comm.). There are also three reports from the United States: a sighting from Illinois (15–25 July 1949; Zimmerman 1949), a sighting from Ohio (29 May 1954; McLaughlin 1979), and a photographic record from New Jersey (30 May 1988; Kane *et al.* 1989). Our record thus represents the 11th report of the species north of Panama and coastal South America, all occurring between 10 March and 25 July.

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