

RECENT SIGHT REPORTS OF LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULLS (*LARUS FUSCUS*) FROM CUBA

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Abstract.—We report the first observations of the Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) for Cuba. Both adults and immatures evidently of the race *L. f. graellsii* were seen along the northern coast of Camagüey Province during autumn 1998 and 1999. These sightings fit with the increasing appearance of this species in the southern United States and the eastern West Indies.

Resumen.—AVISTAMIENTOS RECIENTES DE LA GAVIOTA DE ESPALDA NEGRA MENOR (*LARUS FUSCUS*) EN CUBA. Se describen los primeros avistamientos de *Larus fuscus* en Cuba. Los avistamientos, en la costa norte de la provincia de Camagüey, son de aves adultas e inmaduros. Esta especie era de esperarse en Cuba ya que se había reportado en territorios circundantes.

Key words: Cuba, distribution, *Larus fuscus*, Lesser Black-backed Gull, record, status

ON 11 NOVEMBER 1999 we observed an adult and two first-winter Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus*) at La Boca, a small fishing village in Camagüey Province along the northern coast of Cuba. This village is at Punta de Prácticos, on the eastern side of the passage to Nuevitás between Cayo Sabinal and the western end of Playa Santa Lucía, along the Canal Viejo de Bahamas.

We first noticed two brownish immature gulls, larger than nearby Laughing Gulls (*L. atricilla*), perched on the pilings of a former wharf. Then, near the road, we observed an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull roosting with several dozen Laughing Gulls. It was larger than the Laughing Gulls but not dramatically so, and had a dark ashy gray mantle with blacker wingtips, yellow legs, a white head slightly streaked on the nape and with a black blotch mainly behind the eye, yellow irides, and a yellow bill with a red spot near the gonydeal angle. Suspecting that the larger immature gulls might also be Lesser Black-backed, we flushed them and observed that they had dark outer secondary coverts and a heavily barred rump and upper tail contrasting with a very broad and dark subterminal band, all characters of that species (Grant 1982). The dark gray, not black, mantle of the adult suggested that it was of the southern race *L. f. graellsii*, as are the vast majority of North American reports and specimens of this species (Post and Lewis 1995).

A search of the literature by Jim Wiley, George Wallace, and ourselves failed to locate any previously published reports of Lesser Black-backed Gulls from Cuba. Arturo Kirkconnell of the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural in La Havana, however, advised (*in litt.*) that Paul Prior, Warden of the Long Point, Ontario, Canada, Bird Observatory, had submitted a report of a member of this species appar-

ently molting into third-winter plumage, seen on 14 November 1998 near Playa Santa Lucía. Subsequent correspondence with Mr. Prior revealed that the Lesser Black-backed Gulls we saw in 1999 apparently were at or near the same location as the individual he saw in 1998, an area he was told was known locally as “Cocos Beach.”

Since first reported at Key West in 1938, Lesser Black-backed Gulls have become fairly common visitors to Florida, primarily in winter (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). At least 19 were at various locations in the state during the winter of 1998-9 (West and Anderson 1999). In the northern Bahamas it is considered an “uncommon annual visitor” by White (1998). Records of the species have also been obtained throughout the eastern West Indies (Raffaele *et al.* 1998), so reports from Cuba are not unexpected.

We thank George Wallace and Jim Wiley for their help searching for previous reports of Lesser Black-backed Gulls in Cuba, and Arturo Kirkconnell and Paul Prior for providing information about the 1998 sighting as well as for commenting on earlier drafts of this note.

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PRESS RELEASE FROM BIRDLIFE JAMAICA

RED PARROT DISCOVERED IN JAMAICA

A research team from BirdLife Jamaica, the University of the West Indies and the University of Glasgow working in the upper Rio Grande Valley of Portland (Jamaica) has discovered a red Jamaican Parrot. Jamaica has two endemic parrot species, the Black-billed and Yellow-billed parrot, both of which are almost totally green in color.

The report which was recently published in the 2000 Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club, noted that the bird observed was "strikingly red – similar in intensity to that of the Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao*)" of South America. The individual which was fortunately photographed, also had distinct patches of yellow and green in the wings and tail. Investigations by the research team led to the conclusion that the individual observed was a color morph (or variant) of the Jamaican Yellow-billed Parrot (*Amazona collaria*), which is relatively common in that area of the island. This was the first color morph of a Jamaican parrot ever recorded, and in reference to its combination of colors the photographed individual has been nicknamed "the Reggee Parrot."

Local citrus farmers in the Mill Bank area of Portland informed the team that they had from time to time seen red parrots flying around the area but that they were not common. Despite the fact that Jamai-

can parrots have been studied for the past four years by the Jamaican Parrot Project, the largest biodiversity project ever funded by the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica, there have never been any other encounters with parrots of this kind. The Yellow-billed Parrot population of eastern Jamaica therefore appears to have a rare color variant of which this has been the first record by the local and international scientific community. Further investigations are to be conducted to determine how pervasive is the color variation within the yellow-bills of Portland. Both of Jamaica's endemic parrots are globally threatened species.

BirdLife Jamaica would be interested hearing from other territories that have had any similar reports among Amazona parrots. Our e-mail address is <mailto:birdlifeja@yahoo.com>birdlifeja@yahoo.com. Mailing address: 2 Starlight Ave, Kingston 6, Jamaica W.I. Tel & fax (876) 927-8444 (home) (Catherine Levy, President) or (Leo Douglas, Media Relations Officer) e-mail: leodouglas@cwjamaica.com. Mailing address: 11A Lounsbury Avenue, Kingston 10, Jamaica, W.I. Tel: (876) 924-4203 (home).

For more details, see:

Davis, H., and B. Zonfrillo. 2000. An erythristic Yellow-billed Parrot *Amazona collaria*. Bulletin of the British Ornithological Club 120(1). — *Ed.*