

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*LARUS RIDIBUNDUS*) SEEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED AT GOVERNOR'S HARBOUR, ELEUTHERA, BAHAMAS

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ON 14 NOVEMBER 1996 Aileen M. Bainton, Katherine L. White, and I were birding in Governor's Harbour, Eleuthera when we noticed a single gull on the tidal flats near the boat launching ramp. This gull was present throughout our stay in Eleuthera until 18 November 1996. It was a medium-sized gull with a long slender bill. The distal half of the bill was black and the basal half pale flesh colored. The legs were pinkish-flesh colored. The head was dirty from feeding, but there were noticeable streaks along the back of the neck and a black auricular spot. When the bird flew, we noticed a black terminal band on the tail. The outer half of the upper wings had a large white section on the leading edge. The underside of the wings had a black band near the end of the primaries. When the bird roosted on pilings near the community clinic, it appeared slightly larger than a Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) and noticeably smaller than the Royal Terns (*S. maxima*) roosting nearby. We identified the gull as a first-winter Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) based on its size, wing pattern, head pattern, bill color, and tail band (National Geographic Society 1983, Grant 1986). Distant, but identifiable, photographs of the gull are available from the author.

The Black-headed Gull is a common Eurasian species that has recently colonized northeastern North America. It has nested in Newfoundland and Quebec, and attempted to nest in Massachusetts in 1984 (Veit and Petersen 1993). The Black-headed Gull is an uncommon migrant along the east coast of North America as far south as Florida (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992). It is casual in the West Indies, where it has been found in Cuba, Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, and the

Lesser Antilles (Raffaele 1989, Bond 1993). Raffaele has seen single Black-headed Gulls regularly in winter in San Juan Harbor, Puerto Rico (pers. comm.). It has been recorded once in the Bahama Archipelago – an adult seen and photographed on Grand Turk, 30 and 31 December 1985 (Faanes 1986; G. Rosenberg, in litt.). I am unaware of any previous published report of this species within the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

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PELAGIC BIRD SIGHTINGS OFF DOMINICA

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DUE TO THE PAUCITY OF OBSERVATIONS OF OCEANIC BIRDS from waters near the central Lesser Antilles, the following notes recorded by a Boston University Marine Program marine mammal class led by Ward are of considerable interest. The purpose of the course was to collect occurrence, distributional, and behavioral data on cetaceans in the deep water (200-1000 fathoms) west of Dominica in an area bounded by 61° 38.5' W Longitude, 15° 13' N Latitude and 15° 32' N Latitude. Observations were made daily during the period 15

to 23 January 1997 except for 20 January when no trip was made offshore. Although the primary focus was on whales and dolphins, the bird species encountered were recorded using GPS data for nearly all observations.

The following bird species were recorded:

Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri*.—One observed at close range on 23 January at 15° 20.42' N, 61° 28.73' W.

White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*.—One observed plunge diving on 22 January at 15° 23.19' N, 61° 29.67' W; one seen on 23 January at 15° 20.42' N, 61° 21.73' W with a flock of about 8 Brown Boobies (*Sula leucogaster*).

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*.—Small groups of 3 to 8 birds observed intermittently on 16, 21, and 23 January.

Skua sp. *Catharacta* sp.?—One seen sitting in the water and flying fairly close to the boat in direct comparison with Pomarine Jaegers (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) by L. W. Keith on 19 January at 15° 13.74' N, 61° 24.63' W. The observer, teaching assistant for the class, believed it to be the pale race of South Polar Skua *C. maccormicki* (see Harrison 1983:130, plate 54, number 197b); this opinion is based on her having recently spent a field season on King George Island, Antarctica, where this species is common. However, South Polar Skua should be expected to be far south of the West Indies in January during its breeding season. Also, despite the observer's excellent credentials, due to the extreme difficulty of identifying skuas at sea with certainty, the authors are reluctant to assign this observation to either of the two most likely species (*C. skua* or *C. maccormicki*) without a specimen or a good photograph.

Long-tailed Jaeger *Stercorarius longicaudus*.—One seen on 21 January at 15° 12.58' N, 61° 24.02' W together with Pomarine Jaegers and Brown Boobies; and one seen on 23 January at 15° 15.36' N, 61° 25.89' W. Both had easily visible long central retrices.

Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus*.—Observed every day except 20 January and usually in numbers ranging from single birds, with daily totals of 2–3, to groups of 5 or more, with daily totals up to 8–10 birds. Found virtually throughout the study area. A conservative estimate of the number of individuals observed during the 9-day period is at least 30, though duplicate sightings of some of the same individuals probably occurred. Four color slides taken by L. W. Keith, collectively showing three full adults and two subadults, have been deposited at VIREO.

Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*.—A flock of 4 carefully identified at close range by Ward on 19 January at 15° 24.86' N, 61° 29.32' W.

Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*.—About 4 seen on 21 January at 15° 12.58' N, 61° 24.02' W.

Other bird species.—As might be expected, Magnificent Frigatebirds (*Fregata magnificens*) were occasionally observed at sea up to 3.6 km offshore. On 15 January a group of about 12 small blackish birds was seen fluttering close over the surface of the sea about 8 km west of Pt. Michel, but at too great a distance to establish their identity with any

certainty; they were suspected to have been some species of storm-petrel. A subadult gull, probably Ring-billed (*Larus delawarensis*) but never definitively identified, was present at the Castle Comfort harbor entrance throughout the period. While not unexpected, there are few known Dominica records.

DISCUSSION

Audubon's Shearwater is considered accidental at Dominica (Evans 1990:141), so even the observation of another single individual is of interest. Both the White-tailed Tropicbird and the Brown Booby nest in Dominica waters and so are to be expected. The records for the skua and for Long-tailed Jaeger are the first known for Dominica and are thus significant. Pomarine Jaeger is known from Dominica, but such large numbers are unprecedented and have never been suspected or documented before. The two tern species are not a surprise; if anything, it is surprising that Sooty Terns were not seen more often, a matter that deserves further study. The only species of storm-petrel known for Dominica is Wilson's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*), which is considered accidental (Evans 1990); a southern hemisphere breeder, its presence in the West Indies in January would be almost as surprising as that of South Polar Skua. However, it is possible that non-breeding birds of both latter species occasionally linger farther north into the Northern Hemisphere winter than now expected; only additional field work will settle this issue.

As the above record indicates, many more individual pelagic birds winter over the deep water just west of the central Lesser Antilles than previously documented. As suggested elsewhere (Keith 1997:21), additional deep water observations west of Dominica, Martinique, and St. Lucia will probably be rewarded by future discoveries which will radically change current notions of the variety, number, and distribution of oceanic birds in the southeastern West Indies.

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