

gulls circled with the downwind passage about 2 to 4 meters over our heads. When we tossed a fish into the path of one, it caught the fish easily, often performing intricate aerial maneuvers to do so. We counted only 12 misses in 97 tosses in which we judged the adult should have caught the fish.

The juvenile, on the other hand, hovered out of the mainstream of the flock approximately 10 to 13 meters above and to one side of us. It called frequently, behavior rarely exhibited by the adults, and whenever we threw a fish in its direction, it attempted to avoid rather than catch it. It appeared to be curious about the other gulls' activity but seemed unaware of how to become involved and what to do. After several minutes of hovering nearby, the young bird joined the flight pattern of the adults but remained about 4 to 9 meters over our heads. We attempted to direct fish toward this young individual and in circumstances similar to those of the adult the juvenile caught only one of 23 fish. In four of these cases an adult stole the fish before the young could respond. The one fish the young captured was the last one thrown, approximately ten minutes after it joined the flock.

Watching this bird, it was obvious to us that at first it was attracted to the flock of gulls, and only after a period of time did it realize that food was available. Then it required practice to learn how to catch a tossed fish. Although this is a rather unusual feeding technique, along Florida beaches humans commonly throw food to hovering gulls and this may be an important supplemental food source. We believe this is an example of the learning process involved in the feeding methods of Laughing Gulls and perhaps shows one of the selective factors contributing to mortality of newly independent young.

J.J. Dinsmore and F.E. Lohrer made a valuable comment on this manuscript. *Ralph W. Schreiber and Sanford N. Young, Department of Biology, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, 33620.*

### **A Black-capped Petrel Specimen from Florida**

The Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*) is a rare bird anywhere in North America (Palmer, 1962), and may exist only in small numbers throughout the world because of habitat alteration (Wingate, 1964) and, possibly, more recently because of high DDT body loads (Wingate and Wurster, 1968). Of approximately 12 records from North America, most are of individuals blown north and inland by oceanic storms. The two previous records from Florida, both based on specimens, are from near the Indian River Inlet, winter 1846-47 (see Sprunt, 1954), and the WCTV tower, fall of 1964 (Stoddard and Norris, 1967). The specimen here reported was found sick on Melbourne Beach, Brevard County, on 14 June 1972, by an employee of the Animal Control Department, and it was given to Kale by Carlton

Teate of the Florida Injured Wildlife Sanctuary. Although storm conditions seem not to account for this occurrence, several other pelagic birds (3 Greater Shearwaters, *Puffinus gravis*; 1 White-tailed Tropicbird, *Phaethon lepturus*; 1 Pomarine Jaeger, *Stercorarius pomarinus*) were found sick along the same stretch of beach at about the same time, suggesting some sort of die-off (Ogden, 1972).

We are following the taxonomic decisions expressed in the Handbook (Palmer *op.cit.*), in which the Black-capped Petrel, *P.h. hasitata*, and the Bermuda Petrel, *P.h. cahow*, are considered conspecific, except that this work refers to the species as the Capped Petrel. All North American specimens, so far as we know, are of the nominate race. Details regarding the new Florida specimen are as follows: female, ovary 10 x 6 mm, largest ova 9.5 mm; weight 235 g, emaciated and with no fat; bill 30.5 mm; wing (arc) 302 mm; wing span 1014 mm; tail 133 mm; tarsus 38.5 mm. These data confirm that the specimen represents *P.h. hasitata*.

With some trepidations on our part regarding esthetic qualities, we had the specimen prepared as a complete flat skin as opposed to the standard preparation as a round skin. Thereby we also obtained a complete skeleton. The trachea is preserved in fluid, and most of the rhamphotheca is with the bones. The tarsal sheath was not saved. All parts bear catalogue number GEW 4707. Preparation in this manner provides a complete skeleton verifiable by its skin, of a species reportedly rare in skeleton collections (S.L. Olson, pers. comm.), and a skin better designed for pterylographic and molt studies.

Study of the bones revealed extensive arthritic-like, rough-surfaced ossification of the otherwise undamaged left shoulder bones – the humerus, furcula, scapula, and especially the coracoid. The cause of sickness of this individual remains unknown, but it seems unlikely that a bird designed to fly in order to forage could function properly in its condition. Study of the flat skin revealed a curious absence of most of the greater upper secondary coverts from the left wing only. We are unable to explain this aberrancy, although we note it is on the same side as the injury to the shoulder bones. No normal molt is evident on the specimen.

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Glen E. Woolfenden, Dept. of Biology, University of South Florida, Tampa, Fla. 33620, and Herbert W. Kale, II, Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory, Florida Division of Health, P.O. Box 520, Vero Beach, Fla. 32960.

### Least Terns Nest at Dry Tortugas

As late as the mid-1930's, several hundred pairs of Least Terns (*Sterna albifrons*) bred annually at Dry Tortugas. Thereafter their numbers dwindled rapidly, despite protection, with the last known breeding (one nest on Bush Key) reported in 1949 (see Robertson, 1964. *Bull. Fla. State Mus.*, 8:73-75, for history of the population). More recently, Least Terns have become rare at Dry Tortugas in any season and most of the few seen appear to be transients. From 1963 to date, we know of 10 reports in spring (12 April-25 May) by various observers and one in fall, on the late date of 12 October (Mrs. F.E. O'Brien, 1972). Except for a group of 6 on Garden Key, 12 April 1972, all these observations were of lone adults. For the decade prior to 1973, several weeks of field work annually in June and July produced only two observations of Least Terns. On 8 June 1966, several hours after the center of hurricane Alma crossed directly over Dry Tortugas, C.R. Mason and N.D. Steffee saw 8 adults on Garden Key, and W.B. Robertson saw one there the next day. These birds may have been transported to the area in the eye of the storm. On 3 July 1970, members of that year's tern-banding party found 2 adult Least Terns on East Key, but saw nothing to suggest that they were nesting. Also a long-dead Least Tern was found on Loggerhead Key, 30 June 1970, and the skeleton preserved (G.E.W. No. 4445).

On 1 July 1973, as members of the tern-banding party landed on Middle Key, Dry Tortugas, they saw 4 adult-plumaged Least Terns and one fledged juvenile in the company of 8 adult-plumaged Roseate Terns, *Sterna dougallii*. Search of the island, a barren sand bank with only a small area above high tide, revealed 2 Least Tern nests, one with 2 eggs and the other with one egg, and 4 Roseate nests, each with 2 eggs. We also found an apparently abandoned Least Tern nest with one egg and saw about 15 Roseate eggs, presumably from nests washed out by tides, in the lines of wrack along the beaches. At our next visit on 5 July, we did not see the