

Florida Field Naturalist 17(1): 19-20, 1989.

Feeding Association Between Bonaparte's Gulls and Hooded Mergansers

STANLEY STEDMAN AND ANNETTE STEDMAN
1156 Casey Key Road, Nokomis, Florida 34275

At 0930 hr on 2 December 1987 at Venice Gardens Utility Treatment Ponds, Sarasota County, Florida we observed an interspecific feeding association between 60 Hooded Mergansers (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) and 6 Bonaparte's Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*). There are two ponds, covering about 3.5 ha each, and separated by a grassy area about 8 m wide. All vegetation was removed from the margin of the two ponds. The mergansers moved in a concentrated group and sometimes would dive simultaneously leaving only one or two at the surface of the water. The gulls hovered over the flock dipping into the water continuously, only occasionally alighting on the water and moving with the ducks. Using 7x35 binoculars and 20x telescope we could see the gulls obtain small items (probably fish) stirred up by the mergansers.

This feeding association was observed four more times with the final observation occurring on 31 January 1988. Our observations began at about 0930 hr and usually lasted more than one hour. The number of mergansers present varied from 10 to 60 and the number of Bonaparte's from 6 to 25.

On Jaury 1988 a variation of this feeding association occurred. The mergansers were feeding about 1 m offshore and accompanied by 15-20 Bonaparte's. In addition to the Bonaparte's, a Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*) and a Snowy Egret (*E. thula*) wading at the edge of the water, travelled along closely feeding with the mergansers and gulls. Later the mergansers crossed the pond to the opposite shore, followed at a later time by the gulls and the Snowy Egret. Then the mergansers swam the full length of the pond with the gulls again following and joining them. The Tricolored Heron followed along with two Snowy Egrets.

On three other occasions no feeding association took place even though the mergansers and gulls were present. On another occasion the mergansers were scattered and not feeding but the gulls were feeding over the entire pond. On our final observation on 26 February mergansers were present, but not feeding, and no Bonaparte's were seen.

During all our observations there was no evidence of the gulls harassing the mergansers or robbing them at any time. A small number (1 to 6) of Forster's Terns (*Sterna forsteri*) were usually present but we never observed any feeding interaction or association.

This same feeding behavior was observed by us in February 1979 at Blackburn Bay, Sarasota County, Florida. At that time the participants were Red-breasted Mergansers (*Mergus serrator*) and Bonaparte's Gulls (Stedman and Stedman 1979). Herons (*Casmerodius albus*, *E. thula*, *E. tricolor*) have been reported in feeding association with Red-breasted Mergansers (Parks and Bressler 1963, Emlen and Ambrose 1970). Feeding interaction between Bonaparte's Gulls and Horned Grebes (*Colymbus auritus*) has been reported (Dusi 1968).

LITERATURE CITED

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- Florida Field Naturalist 17(1): 20, 1989.

First Interior Florida Record of the Common Eider

PAUL J. FELLERS

1010 Avenue X, N.W., Winter Haven, Florida 33881

At about 1100 hr on 17 January 1988, M. Hartsaw and I saw a very large duck standing on the edge of a small island about 20 m from the eastern edge of the approximately 1.5 square km International Mineral and Chemical Company's Clear Spring Mine phosphate pit located about 3 km SE of Bartow, Florida. Our vantage point was the top of a 15 m dike looking down on the pit and duck with the sun over the back of our shoulders making for good light. The estimated distance from us to the duck was 50 m. With our variable-powered scopes, we observed the duck swimming and diving about a meter from the island among a male and female Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), several Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*), Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) and Ruddy Ducks (*Oxyura jamaicensis*), making for excellent size comparisons. We concluded that the large duck was a female Common Eider (*Somateria molissima*) which closely matched the picture in the National Geographic Society "Field Guide to the Birds of North America." We noted the overall brownish color; the rather long sloping forehead (similar to the Canvasback's (*Aythya valisineria*) profile) with a long frontal shield; a slight but noticeable light-colored eyeline; and at high magnification, fine close barring along the sides for a few inches at an area beneath where the back of the neck came down to the back. This duck differed from pictures of the King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*) with its more-rounded head, more stubby-looking bill, and the "vee"-shaped markings on the sides.

Several other local birders and I observed the Common Eider later that day and three more times during the next six days, but the duck was never as close to shore as in the first sighting. This Common Eider represents Florida's first interior, fresh-water record and probably the tenth state record.

Florida Field Naturalist 17(1): 20-22, 1989.

Gopher Tortoise Burrow Use by Long-tailed Weasels and Spotted Skunks

PHILIP A. FRANK¹ AND KAREN R. LIPS²

Archbold Biological Station, P. O. Box 2057, Lake Placid, Florida 33852

(Current address: ¹Department of Wildlife and Range Sciences,

University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611, and

²Department of Biology, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida 33124)

Approximately 60 species of vertebrates are known to occur in association with burrows of the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) as accidental, occasional, or obligate residents (Cox et al. 1987, Jackson and Milstrey in press). For this reason, the gopher tortoise may be considered a keystone species (*sensu* Paine 1969) in those habitats where it occurs (Eisenberg 1983). Jackson and Milstrey (in press) list 20 species of mammals among the known animal associates of gopher tortoise burrows, including the eastern spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius*). We report another mammal, the long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*),