FIRST SUMMER RECORD OF THE COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULL FOR PUERTO RICO

by Paul M. McKenzie, Wylie C. Barrow, Jaime A. Collazo, and Cynthia Staicer

ON JULY 22, 1986, WHILE CONducting a shorebird census on the Cabo Rojo salt flats in southwestern Puerto Rico, McKenzie and Barrow located and photographed a second-year Common Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) (*Fig. 1*). Although it appeared exhausted and allowed close approach from a vehicle, the bird flew away shortly after being photographed and could not be relocated. On the following day the bird was rediscovered near the original location and was seen by many observers.

The gull was photographed again by Staicer and McKenzie on August 3 on a salt flat north of the original site. The bird was apparently molting into its first-adult winter plumage, with a very worn tail and wings (*Figs. 2, 3*). The conspicuous dark undersides of the primaries, a field mark of this species, were visible in flight and in a photograph by Staicer (*Fig. 3*). The bird often foraged along the edge of the water and apparently attempted to stir up invertebrates by "pattering" its feet (described as foot-paddling in Cramp and Simmons 1983). It was last seen on August 20.

This is the first summer record of the species in Puerto Rico. To date, the only record of a Common Black-headed Gull in the West Indies outside of the fall or winter season is a sight record in the Grenadines on June 9 (Bond 1980). The origin of such a northern species at this tropical location during July is unknown. This bird could have been a vagrant from Europe or an early fall migrant from recently established breeding colonies in eastern North America.

Substantial evidence exists that numbers of Common Black-headed Gulls are increasing in many areas. McKinnon and Coulson (1987) estimated that numbers of the species have risen in England and Wales at an average annual rate of 5.2% since 1958 and the number of Common Black-headed Gulls overwintering in the British Isles has grown dramatically in recent decades. They contend that the grown birds are coming from Continental Europe. Although winter visitors of this species to eastern North America are suspected to have been from the North Atlantic, transatlantic vagrancy may occur and is more likely at lower latitudes (Cramp and Simmons 1983). Erskine (1963) reported that two Common Black-headed Gulls banded in Germany were recovered the following winter in Barbados and in Veracruz, Mexico. Post-breeding dispersal from established colonies in Europe often begins as early as July (Harrison 1983).

Expansion of the North Atlantic breeding range of the Common Black-headed Gull to the eastern coast of the United States has been well documented (Finch 1978, Salomonsen 1979, Gosselin and David 1982, Cramp *et al.* 1983, David 1983, Aubry 1984, Nikula 1984, Holt *et al.* 1986, Weseloh and Mineau 1986, Drennan *et al.* 1987, and Montevecchi *et al.* 1987). Although this species is described as casual in the Antilles (A.O.U. 1983) and a rare visitor to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands (Bond 1980, Raffaele 1983), increased sightings have recently been made during the late fall-winter season in the West Indies (*Table 1*). ■

Acknowledgments

This information was gathered in con-

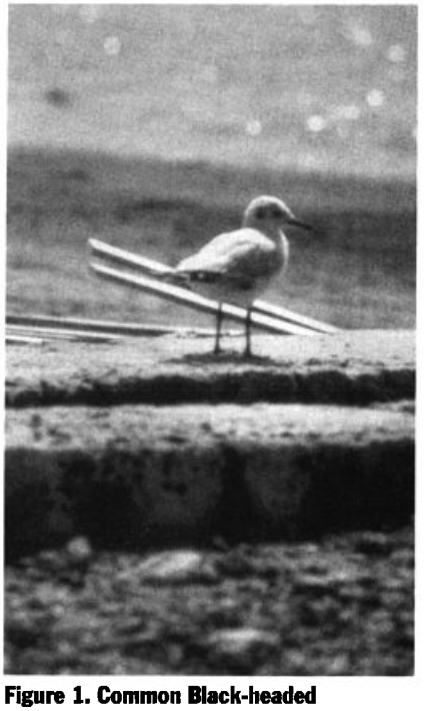

Figure 1. Common Black-headed Gull, Cabo Rojo salt flats, southwestern Puerto Rico, July 22, 1986. Photograph/P. M. McKenzie.

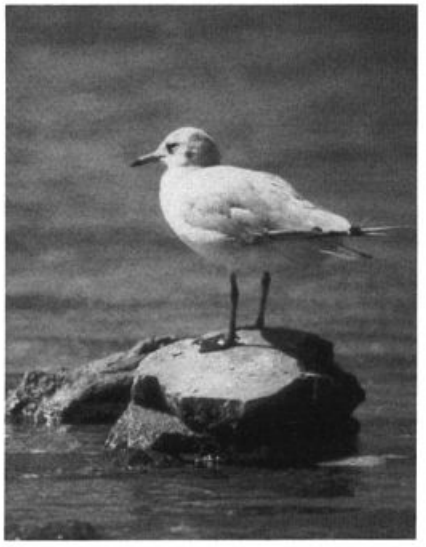

Figure 2. Common Black-headed Gull, Cabo Rojo salt flats, southwestern Puerto Rico, August 3, 1986. Note worn condition of tail feathers. Photograph/C. Staicer.

Figure 3. Common Black-headed Gull molting into first-adult winter plumage, Cabo Rojo salt flats, southwestern Puerto Rico, August 3, 1986. Note molting of wings and tail and characteristic dark undersides of primaries on right wing. Photograph/C. Staicer.

junction with a research project funded by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to Louisiana State University. Research was conducted under the auspices of the Louisiana Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Louisiana State University, and the Wildlife Management Institute cooperating. We also thank the staff of the Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge for technical assistance. We thank J. V. Remsen, S. W. Cardiff, D. L. Dittmann, and K. A. Rosenberg for reviewing slides and confirming the identification. The constructive comments of R. E. Noble, J. V. Remsen, R. B. Hamilton, and P. J. Fogg improved the manuscript.

Literature Cited

AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION. 1983. Check-list of North American Birds. 6th ed. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

AUBRY, Y. 1984. First nest of the Common Black-headed Gull in North America. *Am. Birds* 38: 366-367.

BOND, J. B. 1980. Birds of the West Indies. 4th ed. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

CRAMP, S. and K. E. L. SIMMONS (Eds.). 1983. Handbook of the birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: The birds of the Western Paleartic. Volume III: Waders to Gulls. Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford.

DAVID, N. 1983. The Nesting season: Quebec Region. *Am. Birds* 37: 970-971.

DRENNAN, M. P., D. C. FOLGER, and C. TREYBALL. 1987. Common Black-headed Gulls on Petit Manan Island, Maine. *Am. Birds* 41: 195-196.

ERSKINE, A. J. 1963. The Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) in eastern North America. *Audubon Field Notes* 17: 334-338.

FINCH, D. W. 1978. Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) breeding in Newfoundland. *Am. Birds* 32: 312.

GOSSELIN, M., and N. DAVID. 1982. The Nesting Season: Quebec Region. *Am. Birds* 36: 956-958.

HARRISON, P. 1983. Seabirds: An identification guide. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

HOLT, D. W., J. P. LORTIE, B. J. NIKULA, and R. C. HUMPHREY. 1986. First record of Common Black-headed Gulls breeding in the United States. *Am. Birds* 40: 204-206.

MACKINNON, G. E. , and J. C. COULSON. 1987. The temporal and geographical distribution of Continental Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*) in the British Isles. *Bird Study* 34: 1-9.

MONTEVECCI, W. A. , D. K. CAIRNS, A. E. BURGER, R. D. ELLIOT, and J. WELLS. 1987. The status of the Common Black-headed Gull in Newfoundland and Labrador. *Am. Birds* 41:197-203.

NIKULA, B. 1984. The Spring migration: Northeastern Maritime Region. *Am. Birds* 38: 883.

NORTON, R. L. 1983. The Autumn migration: West Indies Region. *Am. Birds* 37: 228-229.

____. 1984. The Spring migration: West Indies Region. *Am. Birds* 38: 968-970.

____. 1986a. The Autumn migration: West Indies Region. *Am. Birds* 40: 163-164.

____. 1986b. The Winter season: West Indies Region. *Am. Birds* 40: 338-339.

____. 1987. The Winter season: West Indies Region. *Am. Birds* 41: 334-335.

RAFFAELE, H. A. 1983. A guide to the birds of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Fondo Educativo Interamericano, San Juan.

SALOMONSEN, F. 1979. Ornithological and ecological studies on s.w. Greenland (59°46′—62°27′ N. Lat.). *Meddelelser om Grønland.* 204(6): 1-214.

WESELOH, D. V., and P. MINEAU. 1986. Apparent hybrid Common Black-headed Gull nesting in Lake Ontario. *Am. Birds* 40: 18-20.

–U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fish and Wildlife Enhancement, Columbia Field Office, 608 E. Cherry St., Columbia, MO 65201 (McKenzie); P.O. Box N, Palmer, P.R. 00721 (Barrow); North Carolina Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, North Carolina State University, Box 7617, Raleigh, NC 27695 (Collazo); Site 7, Compartment 19, RR #1, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, B2W3X7 Canada (Staicer).

Table 1. Recent late fall and winter season records of Common Black-headed Gulls in the West Indies, 1982-1987.

Locality	Number Observed	Date	Reference
St. Croix	1	Nov. 1982	Norton (1983)
St. Maarten	1	Nov. & Dec. 1983	Norton (1984)
Tortola	1	Nov. 1985	Norton (1986a)
St. Croix	1	Nov. 1985	Norton (1986a)
St. Lucia	1	Jan. 1986	Norton (1986b)
Puerto Rico	2	Feb. 1987	Norton (1987)