

BLUE-FOOTED BOOBY IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

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Between mid-September and 18 October 1976 an immature Blue-footed Booby (*Sula nebouxii*) was present on New Hogan Reservoir, Calaveras County, California. This marks the first recorded inland occurrence of the species in northern California, although there was an earlier report from coastal Pacific Grove, Monterey County, of up to four observed on 16 and 17 October 1971 (DeSante et al., *Am. Birds* 26:112-118, 1972). Also, with one exception, the New Hogan Reservoir observation represents the northernmost recorded occurrence of the species. The exception is one procured in Puget Sound off Everett, Washington on 23 September 1935 (Larrison, *Murrelet* 26:45, 1945). All other western United States records are from southern California, western Arizona, and extreme southern Nevada (McCaskie, *Calif. Birds* 1:117-142, 1970; Monson, *Am. Birds* 26:100, 1972; McCaskie, *Am. Birds* 26:119-124, 1972).

The New Hogan Reservoir bird was first reported by California Department of Fish and Game marine biologists Dave Zeiner and Al Petrovich on 15 September,



Figure 1. Blue-footed Booby (*Sula nebouxii*) present at New Hogan Reservoir, Calaveras County, California from mid-September through 18 October 1976.

Photo by Gerald G. Mugele

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as the bird landed on the water near their boat and spent several minutes attempting to capture and devour the plastic worms at the end of their fishing lines. The bird was also observed attempting to capture fish with the shallow-angle dive described by Palmer (Handbook of North American birds, vol. 1, Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, Conn., 1962). Zeiner was not convinced the bird was successful in obtaining prey from the numerous large schools of Threadfin Shad (*Dorosoma petenense*), which were then near the surface, and apparently the target of the booby's feeding efforts.

On 18 September, after an extensive search of the area, my wife and I found the apparently healthy booby perched on a rock outcrop at the Coyote Point Youth Area on the northwest side of the lake. Subsequently, until the death of the bird on 18 October, it remained between this point and the dam, usually loafing at the marina.

Analysis of field notes, sketches, and subsequent examination of photographs (Figure 1) suggests the bird was an immature beginning the change-over to adult plumage. The mandibles and gular pouch were slate gray, the facial mask somewhat darker. The nape, dorsum, upper surface of the wings and the rectrices were dark brown, the posterior crown darker than the forehead. A white patch was visible on the hindneck, while light tips to the dorsal feathers lent an irregular spotted appearance to the back. The rump was not observed on 18 September, but subsequent examination of photographs showed it was white. Ventral plumage, including the undersides of the rectrices, was dull white, with a sharply defined grayer area on the upper breast and throat. The legs were blue-gray with the feet comparatively paler, as if covered with a powdery bloom, especially on the webbing between the toes. The iris was yellowish-brown and, based on the photos, was apparently round (some adult females exhibit a star-shaped iris). Subsequent preparation of the remains determined that the bird was a female (L. Binford pers. comm.).

While at New Hogan Reservoir, the booby often remained at the marina, where it perched tamely on the pier near the concession stand, begging food from passersby. At times the bird became almost aggressive in its attempts to procure minnow handouts.

On 16 October the booby disappeared from the marina and was subsequently located on the abutments of the old dam about 1.5 km away. The bird appeared listless or diseased. On the 18th it was found lying on its side on the marina beach and taken by the marina operator, Bill Burke, to a veterinarian where it received treatment, but died during the return trip to the marina. The remains were prepared as a study skin at the California Academy of Sciences (CAS 69457).

Though we can only speculate on the origin of this bird, its occurrence in Calaveras County can best be attributed to the passage of a powerful tropical storm, Hurricane *Kathleen*, which passed along coastal western Mexico bringing high winds and warm humid air northward up into southern and central California. A review of weather satellite photos shows that between 9 and 11 September the storm developed due south of the Mexican Michoacan coast, moved northward parallel to the mainland, and passed over and along both coasts of Baja California. It entered the southwestern United States on a broad front which included the eastern boundary of the California Central Valley before turning eastward to disintegrate over the Great Basin. *Kathleen* did deposit hundreds of Least Storm-Petrels on the Salton Sea of southern California and along the lower Colorado River valley from extreme southern Nevada southward, a Leach's Storm-Petrel on the Salton Sea, and a Red-billed Tropicbird in San Bernardino County (McCaskie, Am. Birds in press, 1977; Witzeman et al., Am. Birds in press, 1977).

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Figure 2. Blue-footed Booby (*Sula nebouxii*) present at New Hogan Reservoir, Calaveras County, California from mid-September through 18 October 1976.

Photo by Gerald G. Mugele

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