

FIRST RECORDS OF THE RED-FOOTED BOOBY IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES

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A Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*) visited Southeast Farallon Island, 43 km west of San Francisco, California, on 26 August 1975. A second individual visited the same locality on 12 October 1975. These are the first reported occurrences of the species in the western continental United States. The other mainland United States records have been in Florida, Texas and Louisiana (Woolfenden 1965, Palmer 1962).

In mid-afternoon on 26 August 1975 we saw a Red-footed Booby perched on a large log about 10 m inland from the rocky shoreline of the island. Our approach startled the booby and it flew off almost immediately. A few hours later the bird was rediscovered on the same perch and was observed from 12 m with 7 × 35 binoculars and a 25x spotting scope by all four people on the island (HRH, TJJ, John Bowen and David Schorran). It was also photographed (Figure 1).

After dark the booby was caught and examined more closely. Its body was white, the tail and flight feathers dark brown, and the head washed with the yellow of the adult Red-footed Booby. There were a few dark feathers on the back and a few dark upper secondary and tertial coverts. The flight feathers were checked for molt:



Figure 1. Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*) and Western Gull (*Larus occidentalis*) on Southeast Farallon Island, California, 26 August 1975.

Photo by T. James Lewis

NOTES

primaries numbers 1 to 5 new, 6 half grown, 7 to 10 old; secondaries new except 4, which was old; tertials all new; rectrices new except L 1 and 2 growing, R 1 old and badly worn, R 2 missing. The feet and legs were dull red and the nails ivory. The iris was brown and the skin around the eye was blue-gray. The bill, blue fading to rosy pink on the basal portion, was tipped with dark brown. Measurements taken include: culmen 89.7 mm; tarsus 41.8 mm; wing length 403 mm; weight 1485 g. While in hand the bird regurgitated five Pacific Sauries (*Cololabis saira*), 13-15 cm in length, a common schooling fish of offshore waters. After an hour the bird was banded (band number 807-77540) and released; it was not seen again.

On 12 October 1975 a second Red-footed Booby was sighted on Southeast Farallon. It was observed with 7 × 35 binoculars for about 5 minutes from 250 m by Keith Hansen, Phil Henderson and Jon Winter. The bird was being harrassed in flight by Western Gulls (*Larus occidentalis*). An adult in white phase, it differed from the first bird in its possession of a white tail.

The Red-footed Booby is found in tropical waters around the world. It is non-migratory, but ranges quite far for food; it usually avoids coasts except for breeding and roosting. One has been recorded 1120 km from its place of banding (Palmer 1962). The adult has two color phases: white (white body with dark flight feathers and either dark or white tail) and brown (all brown or brown with white tail).

Because of the great variation in this species, we are unable to determine the subspecies of the Farallon birds. On geographical grounds they should represent one of the Pacific races, *rubripes* of the central and southern Pacific and Indian oceans, or *websteri* of the eastern Pacific, neither of which has previously been recorded in North America, north of Mexico. The large size and dark tail of the first bird suggest *websteri*.

It is possible that either or both of these birds could have been helped in their journey to Southeast Farallon by riding part or all of the way on shipboard.

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LITERATURE CITED

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Woolfenden, G.E. 1965. A specimen of the Red-footed Booby from Florida. Auk 82:102-103.

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