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Occurrence of the Laughing Gull (Larus atricilla) in the Marshall Islands

Kimball L. Garrett

Although gulls *(Larus)* are essentially absent as breeders and regular visitors on oceanic islands of tropical and subtropical regions, the tendency of many species to wander widely or to accompany ships has led to an increasing number of gull records for even the remotest tropical islands. Despite this, there are few documented records of gulls from Micronesia (Baker 1951, Owen 1977, Pyle and Engbring 1985) and only one from the Marshall Islands: a Franklin's Gull *(Larus pipixcan)* from Majuro Atoll on 10 June 1975 (Anderson 1978, 1981).

On 21 May 1986, while conducting bird population surveys at Bikini Atoll in the northern Marshall Islands, I saw and photographed an adult Laughing Gull in alternate plumage on Bokantuak Islet, 0.5 km south of Bikini Islet. On 22 May, what was undoubtedly the same individual was seen and photographed on Iomelan Islet, 0.5 km south of Bokantuak. Ten color transparencies were taken of the bird, two of which are reproduced here in black and white (Figs. 1 and 2). These show the entirely black head, white eye crescents, dark gray mantle shading to black primaries, and white trailing edge to the wing. The original color transparencies show a deep red bill, brightest at the tip and tinged dusky at the base. The overall size of the bird was clearly larger and stockier than a Crested Tern (Sterna bergii). Other gulls, and in particular the Franklin's Gull (see Pyle and Engbring 1987 for a photograph of an adult from Truk, Caroline Islands), can be eliminated by the present bird's larger overall size, heavier bill, lack of white in the primaries, and longer, more pointed wings. The bird was observed in flight as close as ten meters and also while perched with Black Noddies (Anous minutus) on the fringing reef.

The bird was not observed foraging, and no direct interactions with resident seabirds were noted; it did make one circling pass over a group of White Terns (*Gygis alba*) which were hovering overhead in agitated fashion as I passed near their nesting sites on Iomelan Islet.

Laughing Gulls breed no closer to the western Pacific Ocean than western Mexico (where they are quite local); non-breeding birds occur along the Pacific Coast of the Americas from Mexico south to Peru (Black 1977, AOU 1983). R.L. Pitman (unpubl. data) has recorded Laughing Gulls at sea in the eastern tropical Pacific to about longitude 124°W (at 10°N). Records farther west in the Pacific are concentrated in the Hawaiian Islands, where very small numbers have been recorded almost annually in recent years (see R. L. Pyle, Hawaiian Islands region of *American Birds*, for recent records). King (1967) cites six records for the Line Islands, one for the Phoenix Islands, and an additional record at sea south of the Hawaiian Islands. A photograph of an immature bird in Western Samoa on 23 January 1980 was recently published (Muse *et al.* 1980). The present record is the first for Micronesia (Pyle and Engbring 1985).

One can only speculate on the origins and the mode of travel of vagrant gulls. Ship-assisted passage is plausible and may help explain the present case of an essentially continental species some 9500 km west of its normal range. Important shipping lanes pass to the north of the northern Marshall Islands. Conversely, data from the eastern tropical Pacific suggest that Laughing Gulls regularly range far out to sea and that a natural occurrence in the Marshall Islands is not implausible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the Bikini Atoll Rehabilitation Committee, K. Hiner and J. Maragos for access and logistical support during my stay on Bikini Atoll. P. Bruner, J. Enbring, R.L. Pyle, and R.W. and E.A. Schreiber provided helpful comments on a draft of the manuscript. R.L. Pitman kindly shared his data from the eastern tropical Pacific.

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Figure 1. Laughing Gull at Bikini Atoll, Marshall Islands. Photo by Kimball L. Garrett



Figure 2. Laughing Gull at Bikini Atoll, Marshall Islands. Photo by Kimball L. Garrett

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Revised status of the Nordmann's Greenshank on Guam

Janet M. Williams

In a previous issue of the '*Elepaio* (Williams and Grout 1985), I reported the sighting of a Nordmann's Greenshank (*Tringa guttifer*) on the island of Guam in September and October 1983. Recently, I have been contacted by various people in Southeast Asia, through INTERWADER, the East Asia/Pacific Shorebird Study Programme, on the subject of this Nordmann's Greenshank record. The world population of this species may be less than 1000 birds (Duncan Parish, pers. comm.), and therefore careful attention is being paid to every possible sighting.

As my main indentification reference for shorebirds while in Guam, I used King et al. (1983). Mr. John R. Howes, INTERWADER'S wader indentification specialist, has indicated to me (pers. comm.) that this reference is not entirely adequate for the Nordmann's Greenshank in non-breeding plumage and especially in describing the bird's bill. In his letter to me, Howes states that: "... the bill as well as being stout is slightly upturned, and the basal half is clearly yellow, the tip being a dark horn colour. This feature is striking on a bird even at long range. Normann's Greenshank appears in shape more like a large bulky Terek Sandpiper (Xenus cinereus) than a Common Greenshank (Tringa nebularia) or Great Knot (Calidris tenuorostris)." Howes indicates that feeding behavior is an important identifying characteristic of Nordmann's Greenshank being "... similar to Terek Sandpiper when foraging for crabs, on a sandy substrate ...," and "... unique when feeding in shallow pools, with a slightly opened bill, continuously pecking the pool bottom. When a prey is disturbed it is then picked up, taken to a dry area, the legs shaken off and the body swallowed, followed by the legs."

The bird we saw did not appear as large and bulky as a Terek Sandpiper, and we never saw the above described feeding behavior. Howes lists further features of the Nordmann's Greenshank that we did not note, such as a white lower back and extra webbing between toes, and we noted some features that he did not feel were characteristic of the species, such as a straight bill and gray back. In a careful study of the recently published guide to the waders of the world by Hayman *et al.* (1986), I still find no bird that comes any closer to the one we saw on Guam than the Nordmann's Greenshank. However, because we were not able to get a photograph of the bird and there was no one experienced with Asian shorebirds or waders on Guam, and considering the description presented by Howes, I would like to suggest that our identification of the Norman's Greenshank be considered hypothetical.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Patricia Grout, Timothy Williams, John Engbring, John Howes, and Duncan Parish for their comments on the manuscript.

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Birds of New Guinea: A Review

Birds of New Guinea, by Bruce M. Beehler, Thane K. Pratt, and Dale A. Zimmerman. Illustrated by Dale A. Zimmerman and James Coe. Princeton University Press. 1986. cloth: \$65.00; paper: \$37.50. 295 pages, 55 plates plus numerous drawings.

The Birds of New Guinea is a long-awaited addition to the field guides covering southeast Asia, Australasia, and the Pacific. Beehler, Pratt, and Zimmerman have pooled their extensive experience in a cooperative effort with other New Guinea bird experts, namely H.L. Bell, B.W. Finch, and J.M. Diamond, to produce an informative modern text treating a diverse and unique ornithological region. This is the first field guide to comprehensively cover all of New Guinea's avifauna.

The book is surprisingly compact, considering that it covers 725 species. While field testing Birds of New Guinea on a recent trip to Papua New Guinea, I found it easy to use and sturdy. The paperback edition is surprisingly rugged; it scarcely warped at all in the supersaturated New Guinea environment.

The text is addressed primarily to the birdwatcher, but includes so much "new" information, that any ornithologist interested in Australasian, Pacific, or southeast Asian avifauna will find it an indispensable reference. The amount of behavioral data is impressive, and the species accounts are complemented by addition of material on Papuan natural history, birding tips for "in the field," and a handy gazetteer. Zimmerman and Coe illustrate virtually all species in 48 color and 7 half tone plates, grouped in the center of the book. Accompanying the text are many line drawings that do not duplicate the plates.

In the introduction, the authors reveal the coverage of the text: "This volume treats the some 725 species of birds known, or expected to occur, within the Papuan Region." The introduction also includes a brief taxonomic discussion of the avifauna, coverage of Papuan geography, and an explanation of the format of the species accounts.

The purpose of the lengthy natural history sections following the Introduction is to familiarize the reader with the unique natural features of New Guinea, to place New Guinea into perspective with other tropical regions, and to help the prospective traveler in planning a trip. While the natural history section seems lengthy for a field guide, it is clear that readers can use this information not only to enhance their knowledge about the area, but also to help in bird identification. It makes sense to centralize major ecological and distributional topics for easy reference. For example, in order to successfully birdwatch in New Guinea one must understand the concepts of mixed species feeding flocks, congeneric replacement, and the influence of altitude on bird distribution. I found these sections both accurate and helpful.

The species accounts are typical in construction, including descriptions of species appearance and information on similar species, voice, habits, and range. The species accounts occupy only 190 pages, and the writing style is thus rather telegraphic. Although the species accounts are a bit brief to stand by themselves, they are much enhanced by the family treatments, which are perhaps the most useful component of the book. It is in these paragraphs that the authors treat the characteristics of each family and discuss the major groups within each family. These accounts are well written and informative. Most new students of Papuan ornithology will find them invaluable. The authors are to be commended for recognizing the importance of detailed family treatments.

As can be expected in a comprehensive but succinct text, there are some errors and editorial oversights. Most are simple typesetting or grammatical errors, but there are some content errors. One obvious error is a statement in the family treatment of the Monarch Flycatchers which states that monarchs have not been recorded above 1600 meters, although the first species account lists the Black Monarch as being common between 1400-2200 meters. Similar errors occur elsewhere.

I found the voice descriptions to be a weak feature of the text. In the introductory sections, the authors stress song as critical to locating and identifying many forest species, but in their attempts to help the observer, the authors have included overly complex descriptions of voice. While using the book in the field, I found many of the descriptions long, adjective ladened, and confusing. For example, the account of the song of the Variable Pitohui begins with "Loud, musical, bubbling, jumbled series of oriolelike gurgling whistles, interspersed with scratchy catlike sounds . . . " and goes on with an additional complex description. The authors overuse comparisons of bird songs to other sounds or other bird songs which frequently are confusing. The use of such subjective terms as unpleasant, annoying, disagreeable, pretty, is not helpful. However, the schematic diagrams that accompany many song descriptions are useful, accurate, and thereby strengthen the voice descriptions.

Most of the book's serious errors are in the illustrations. Few plates were error-free. Having seen photos of some of the original plates, I conclude that most color errors can be attributed to the color separation process. A majority of the plates seem washed out, probably from poor printing, while others appear blurry. Rendering of color is inconsistant from copy to copy. Red-browns appear purplish in some copies of the softbound edition, but are correct in others. When limited to 10-12 species, the plates in this volume are outstanding; I especially like the plate depicting the swallows. But some plates depicting 17 to 22 species in various plumages seem too overcrowded. In several genera (e.g., the scrub wrens, mouse warblers, and Melanocharis berrypeckers), Zimmerman depicted incorrect body form, proportions, and to a lesser extent plumage coloration. His plates also depict incorrect colors of soft body parts, including iris and leg colors in many species. However, to Zimmerman's credit are some of the best plates I have seen illustrating logrunners, lorikeets, pigeons and doves, and kingfishers. The plate of flying small parrots is one of the best in the book, for it is in flight that most lorikeets are seen. It would have been helpful if the authors included illustrations of the pigeons and shorebirds in flight. All things considered, Zimmerman's illustrations were adequate, but not outstanding.

Unfortunately, I cannot say the same for Coe's work. On all but two plates (rails and terns), Coe's birds have incorrect body proportions; in other words, feet are too large, bills too long, legs too short, and necks too fat. The plates depicting shorebirds have a great many errors. One need only look at the long-legged waders to see numerous examples of incorrect body proportions. The flight profiles included on the shorebird plates are too small, and they are illustrated at odd angles making them virtually useless as identification aids.

Despite these criticisms, the authors are to be congratulated on the amount of information they have synthesized to produce this volume. Birds of New Guinea is a must for any naturalist traveling to New Guinea. It is also a very useful reference for birding in tropical Australia and can be used as a companion guide with many field guides of the region such as G. Pizzey's A Field Guide to Birds of Australia and B. King and E. C. Dickinson's A Field Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia.

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HAWAII AUDUBON MAY PROGRAM "JEWELS OF THE FOREST"

A Bill Mull presentation is more than a program: it's a production, highly informative, and entertaining; and something new and different was added this time--a song rendered by the incomparable Bill Mull himself. Mull has been a long-time member, board member, and past president of Hawaii Audubon, a researcher in the Entomology Department of Bishop Museum, and a resident of the Big Island for 16 years.

At the Hawaii Audubon General Meeting in May, Mull spoke on the "Jewels of the Forest"--Hawaii tree snails. Of the 1,000 recognized and named species of land snails in Hawaii (the subject of his talk), more than half are extinct. Their decline in the last 20 years has been due to cannibal snails, brought in from Florida to cope with African snail pests here. Our "jewels of the forest" were instead attacked by these foreigners who followed them to the uplands and trees which are their habitat. There are 41 species of land snails in Hawaii, all listed as endangered. All of Bill's slides are of live snails, not just shells.

Most Hawaiian tree snails are nocturnal. Many produce their young alive, bearing only one "kid" at a time, not great numbers of eggs as in most mainland snails. The "kid," fully formed but tiny, sticks close to mama, who pays little or no attention to it. The baby eventually goes off on its own independent life. Looked at from the apex of the shell, spirals go either to right or left, so are referred to as left- and right-handed. In many cases, snails prefer wind blown, scrubby habitat. They cruise on the undersides as well as the tops of leaves, consume algae or fungi, but do not eat the leaves themselves, thus keeping them clean. Some snails are hermaphrodites (both sexes in one individual). Life span is about 8 years, and they do not reach sexual maturity until 6. Shells develop spirally with the growth of the snail.

Breathtakingly lovely slides of snails were a major attraction of Mull's presentation, with beautiful and varied colors, stripes, bands, and patterns displayed. Mama and kid were shown on the same leaf together. Skill and artistry are needed to produce these slides, as the subjects are as small as one quarter inch, and range up to slightly more than an inch. Mull said most of his pictures are taken at midnight or the small hours of the morning, when the snails are most active. Photographers must accommodate themselves to their subjects.

Betty L. Johnson

PALIKEA FIELD TRIP REPORT

Many thanks to Mark Merlin for leading the May 17th field trip to Palikea in the Waianae Mountains. Participants were treated to a wealth of information regarding the natural and cultural history of the Palikea area, and everyone was able to observe examples of native flora and fauna, along with the familiar introduced species.

Birds encountered during the trip included Common 'Amakihi, 'Apapane, Red Avadavats, Common Mynas, Red-crested and Northern Cardinals, Japanese Bush-Warblers, Spotted and Barred Doves, House Finches, Japanese White-eyes, Spotted Munias, Red-vented Bulbuls, Erckel Francolins, and two Warbling Silverbills. Half of the group reached the top of the trail ahead of the others and were greeted by a Pueo circling just off the ridge.

Also seen during the outing were several unusual and uncommon native plants, such as *Lobelia yuccoides*, *Clermontia oblongifolia*, sandalwood (*Santalum ellipticum*) and the yellow-flowered Ohia (lehua mamo, *Metrosideros polymorpha*). Oahu tree snails were also observed such as *Achatinella mustelina* and an *Auriculella* believed to be *Auriculella ambusta*.

Several participants expressed happiness that there are a few places left in the Waianaes where native ecosystems still exist.

Bruce Eilerts

ALOHA TO NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members and encourage them to join in our activities. NEW LIFE MEMBER: Bob Payne, Kamuela, HI NEW LOCAL MEMBERS: H. Frank Allen, Burlingame, CA Edith Sewel Bergmanis, Honolulu, HI David J. Blick, Corvallis, OR Edward C. Brennan, Ewa Beach, HI Arthur Buckman, Wahiawa, HI Teri Caldwell, Honolulu, HI Grace F. Clark, Capistrano Beach, CA Robert Fulfer, Tucson, AZ Rosemary K. Gifford, Kailua, HI Scott Gildner, Arlington, VA Kris Gourlay, Kailua, HI Phyllis Y. Ha, Kailua, HI Mara Haggerty, Honolulu, HI David Hayes, Kailua, HI Donald D. Hertz, Vancouver, WA Michael R. Howard, Pearl City, HI Anthony T. Jones, Honolulu, HI Stella P. Keil, Pearl City, HI Steven Kin, Honolulu, HI Jean Miyoko Kubota, Kaneohe, HI Anne W. Mattill, Concord, MA Michael P. McKenney, Kailua, HI Scott Miller, Honolulu, HI Kunane Nihipali, Pupukea, HI Janice C. Planas, Honolulu, HI Molly Polanski, Pearl City, HI Joseph L. Rick, San Carlos, CA Dennis W. Rollenhagen, Newaygo, MI Riki Saito, Kaneohe, HI Richard Schneider, Menlo Park, CA Rick Scudder, Honolulu, HI Donna J. Seaman, Belfair, WA Richard S. Shirley, Wrentham, MA Hilary Stoermer, Honolulu, HI Stefan Zaremba, Burnaby, B.C., Canada

JOB OPENING - WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST STATE OF HAWAII

The Division of Forestry and Wildlife will be advertising this month for a nongame Wildlife Biologist IV position in its Honolulu office. Persons interested in applying should read the advertisement to be published in the Star Bulletin/Advertiser Sunday issue, 5 July, or call Thane Pratt at the Division office, 546-8850.

JULY 19th FIELD TRIP TO AIEA RIDGE

The July 19th H.A.S. field trip will be a hike along Aiea Ridge trail. This walk will be difficult at times. Participants will be able to observe native and introduced birds. Bring along a lunch, binoculars, rain gear, and sunscreen. Everyone interested should meet at 7:30 AM in front of the State Library on Punchbowl Street or at 8:30 at the Aiea State Park upper parking lot. For more information contact Bruce or Robin Eilerts at 941-5974.

JULY PROGRAM: BIRDS OF HAWAII AND THE TROPICAL PACIFIC - AN ART EXHIBITION BY H. DOUGLAS PRATT

The general meeting will not be held in July; instead members are invited to attend the opening of *Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific*: an exhibition of original art by H. Douglas Pratt. This art exhibit is being cosponsored by the Hawaii Audubon Society and the B. P. Bishop Museum, and will be held in the Jabulka Pavillion at the Museum from 30 July to 10 November 1987.

The exhibit features original artworks by H. Douglas Pratt, including: (1) original paintings from a selection of the plates in the recently published book, *A Field Guide to the Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific*, by H. D. Pratt, P. L. Bruner and D. W. Berrett, and (2) line drawings and other original items currently in Pratt's possession, as well as other Pratt paintings borrowed from the Hawaii State Foundation for Culture and the Arts and Hawaii residents.

The exhibit will open at 7:00 PM, and at 8:00 PM visitors will be asked to meet at the Atherton Halau for the formal opening and a slide presentation by H. Douglas Pratt. Light refreshments will be served.

A Field Guide to the Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific, published by Princeton University Press, will be sold in the Shop Pacifica at the Museum. All three authors will be present to sign books.

FREE ICE CREAM!

Will again be served to those volunteers who help with the typing, proof-reading, or paste-up of next month's '*Elepaio* at Thane Pratt's house, 1022 Prospect St., on Saturday, 18 July, at 1:00 PM. Phone Sheila Conant, 988-3960 (home). Many thanks to Bob Pyle, Joel Simasko, and Leann Syrotuck for helping with the preparation of this month's issue!

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- July 13 (Mon.) Board Meeting at Bishop Museum at 7:00 PM. Call Pete Luscomb,923-4772 (wk).
- July 18 (Sat.) 'Elepaio paste-up at Thane Pratt's house at I:00 PM. Call Sheila Conant, 988-3960 (h) for details.
- July 19 (Sun.) Field trip to Aiea Ridge Trail. Meet at 7:30 AM at State Library on Punchbowl St. See p. 77 for announcement.
- July 30 (Thurs.) OPENING-BIRDS OF HAWAII AND THE TROPICAL PACIFIC: original art by H. Douglas Pratt. Jabulka Pavillion. Exhibit opens at 7:00 PM; talk by H. D. Pratt to follow. See announcement on p. 77 for details. No general meeting this month.

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