

## NOTES

### SOUTHERNMOST RECORDS OF WESTERN AND YELLOW-FOOTED GULLS

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On 27 April 1988 we visited the coastal lagoons at La Ventosa, 5 km east of Salina Cruz, Oaxaca, Mexico. Scanning through a flock of about 800 Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) and 200 Franklin's Gulls (*L. pipixcan*) we were surprised to see two adult Yellow-footed Gulls (*L. livens*). While we were watching these, a third large dark-backed gull flew over us and landed in the flock. As it appeared smaller, slighter, and paler-backed than the Yellow-footeds, the possibility of a Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*) crossed our minds. Closer examination, however, showed this bird to be a Western Gull (*L. occidentalis*). We approached the gulls to within 50 m and watched them at rest and in flight over the course of three hours. The following descriptions are taken from our field notes.

Yellow-footed Gulls: very large and heavily built (obviously larger than nearby Caspian Terns). Heavy bill orange-yellow with red gonys spot; legs and feet bright orange-yellow. Head and underparts white. Upperparts blackish slate; wingtips blacker with small inconspicuous white tips to outer primaries. Rump and tail white with no trace of dark tail band. As seen when the birds flew overhead, underside of primaries and secondaries dark. The two birds appeared similar in size and stayed close together at all times.

Western Gull: a large gull, clearly larger than Caspian Tern but noticeably smaller than the Yellow-footed Gulls (therefore perhaps a small female?). Bill relatively heavy (but less so than the Yellow-footeds'), yellow with red gonys spot; legs dull pink. Head and underparts white. Upperparts slaty gray, similar in shade to those of an adult Laughing Gull, and very worn; wing-coverts frayed and faded, blackish wingtips worn and faded with no white tips visible. Rump and tail white, rectrix tips very worn. As seen when the bird flew overhead, underside of primaries and secondaries dark, though secondaries slightly paler. Although at times standing near the Yellow-footed Gulls, the Western Gull stayed mostly apart and at one point flew off alone toward the coast, returning some 30 minutes later.

We are very familiar with both species, and the identifications were facilitated by the birds' being adults. The relatively pale gray upperparts of the Western Gull suggest the northern-breeding subspecies, *L. o. occidentalis*, for which, surprisingly, there appear to be no Mexican records (Friedmann et al. 1950, Wilbur 1987). The small size, however, suggests the darker-backed southern subspecies *L. o. wymani* (LeValley 1980). Binford (1989) did not list either species from Oaxaca, and we are aware of no other records from the state.

Although Yellow-footed Gulls have been recorded from Guerrero, in November 1983 (Pitman 1986), April 1973 (Jehl 1974), and on 23 May 1990 (an adult at Bahía Papanao, pers. obs.), we have found no confirmed records of the Western Gull south of the tip of Baja California, although "a report from the Revillagigedo Islands (Isla Clarión) probably pertains to this species" (American Ornithologists' Union 1983). The source of reports of the Western Gull from Sinaloa and Nayarit (A.O.U. 1983) is unclear, and these reports more likely refer to the Yellow-footed Gull (Friedmann et al. 1950). In addition, Stiles and Skutch (1989) mentioned a Western

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or Lesser Black-backed Gull from Costa Rica, although the observer considers the bird to have been a Lesser Black-backed Gull (S. Perkins pers. comm.). Our Oaxaca records thus appear to represent the southernmost records of both species, and are remarkable for their coincidence.

Other interesting birds present at the Salina Cruz lagoons on 27 April 1988 included 11 Hudsonian Godwits (*Limosa haemastica*), 18 days earlier than Binford's earliest record, eight adult Gull-billed Terns (*Sterna nilotica*), apparently paired, and two immature Sandwich Terns (*Sterna sandwicensis*).

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