

FIRST NESTING RECORD OF THE LAUGHING GULL FOR THE WEST COAST OF BAJA CALIFORNIA, MEXICO

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From November 1992 to June 1993 we conducted biweekly bird surveys at Ojo de Liebre (Scammon's) Lagoon on the west coast of Baja California Sur, México. During our surveys we found four pairs of Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) breeding on Piedras Island (27° 42' 18" N, 114° 09' 36" W), one of five small and relatively low islands inside the lagoon (Figure 1).

On 9 May we found two occupied Laughing Gull nests 25 m apart on a gentle slope in the southern part of the island. One of these nests (nest 1) was constructed on pickleweed (*Salicornia* sp.) and contained one egg. Nest 2, constructed on Alkali Heath (*Frankenia* sp.), was empty. We marked the nests with aluminum tags and the nest sites with flags to facilitate their relocation. On May 16, we checked the nests again: nests 1 and 2 contained three and one egg, respectively. On this visit, about 700 m northwest of nests 1 and 2, we found a third pair of Laughing Gulls nesting on *Salicornia*, but they had no eggs. Eighteen days later (8 June), nests 1 and 2 contained three eggs each, but nest 3 was apparently abandoned. Measurements of four eggs averaged 55.6 by 39.1 mm. The egg-laying dates observed are consistent with reports (mid-April–May) from other areas (Terres 1980, Frohring and Kushlan 1986).

On 27 June, during our last visit, nests 1 and 2 were empty, without eggs or nestlings, but still occupied by the adults. Each nest contained eggshell fragments, and the adults remained close to them, alert, suggesting that nesting was successful and the young were probably still around. About 200 m southwest of nest 3, we saw another pair of Laughing Gulls (nest 4), but again we were unable to find any young.

The Laughing Gull has been reported as a regular winter visitor of both coasts of the Baja California peninsula south of 27° N (Wilbur 1987). There are two previous winter reports north of this latitude, one from offshore near San Felipe (Howell and Webb 1992), the other from the Río Hardy and Campo Mosquedo area (Patten et al. 1993), both on the east side of the state of Baja California (Norte).

The Laughing Gull breeds colonially, mainly on the east coast of the Americas (Small 1951, Richards 1990), ranging from Maine to South America (Friedmann et al. 1950, Peterson and Chalif 1989, Richards 1990). On the Pacific side, Laughing Gulls breed along the coasts of Guatemala and El Salvador in colonies of several hundred (Miller and van Rossem 1929), as well as on the coasts of Sonora, Sinaloa, and Nayarit, México (Friedmann et al. 1950, Richards 1990). North of the tropics, sporadic nesting has been reported from 1928 to 1957 on islands in the Salton Sea, California (Miller and van Rossem 1929, Small 1951) and more recently at Montague Island in the northern Gulf of California, where Palacios and Mellink (1992) found a small colony.

Prior to 1993, there were no records of Laughing Gulls at Ojo de Liebre Lagoon at any season (Bancroft 1927, Bostic 1975, Wilbur 1987). Massey and Palacios (1994), however, listed the species for this lagoon, on the basis of sightings in 1993 (E. Mellink pers. comm.). Ours is the first nesting record for this area, for the state of Baja California Sur, and for the west side of the Baja California peninsula.

NOTES

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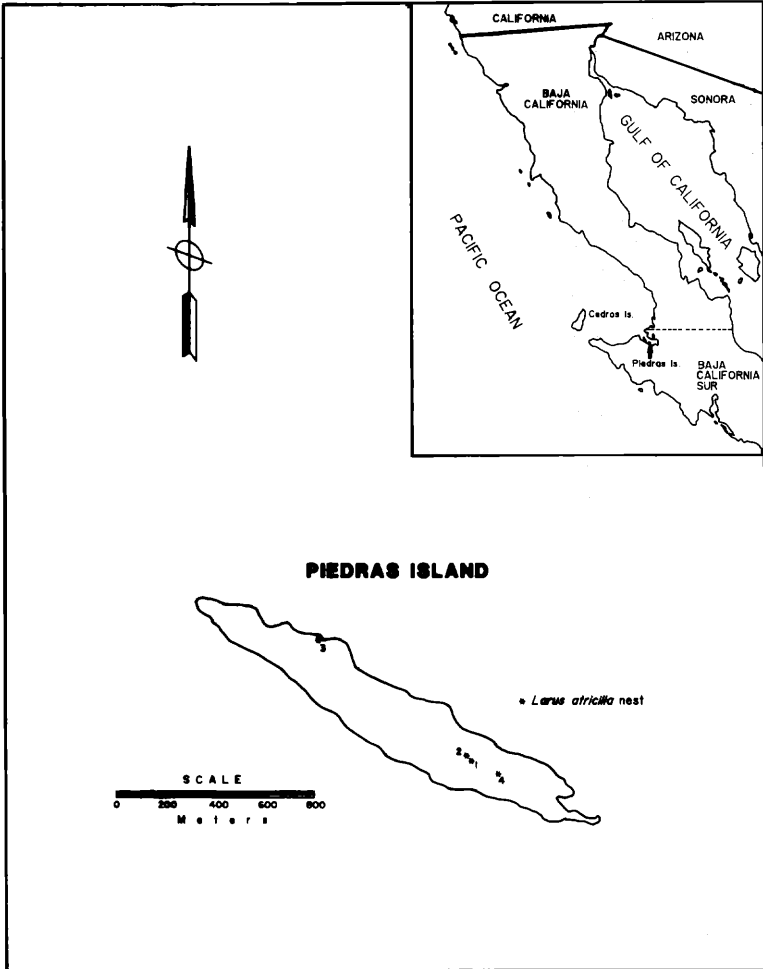


Figure 1. Locations of Laguna Ojo de Liebre (Scammon's Lagoon) and Piedras Island, Baja California Sur, México. Numbers specify Laughing Gull nests.

NOTES

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