

BLACK-HEADED GULL ON THE ALABAMA COAST

Thomas A. Imhof

On the clear morning of Thursday, March 30, 1978, at about 7:15, I was scanning the Gulf at Fort Morgan Beach with my 30x B&L spotting scope. About one-quarter mile to the west in perfect light were two large loosely-assembled flocks of Laughing and Bonaparte's Gulls. Almost immediately I spotted in the Laughing Gull flock a bird with Bonaparte's wing markings. This bird, it soon developed, had the same size, flight and feeding behavior of a Laughing Gull but did not dip daintily or flutter as does the Bonaparte's. Further it showed an all-white tail, dark but noticeably reddish bill and legs, and dark on the underside of the primaries as in the Caspian Tern. Behind the eye was a dark smudge. The bird was identified as a winter adult Black-headed Gull (Larus ridibundus)--ridibundus means laughing in Latin. The bird was followed with the 30x scope for at least five minutes in perfect light until lost in the crowd. Although several observers searched for the bird in the subsequent week, none looked early in the morning when the sun afforded perfect light on the thousands of gulls and terns that feed just east of the entrance to Mobile Bay. It was not seen again.

In Europe in 1944-45 I saw the Black-headed Gull many times and was impressed with its similarity in size and flight to a Laughing Gull. However, most American field guides liken it to a Bonaparte's, probably because it usually occurs with Bonaparte's on the North Atlantic Coast where Laughing Gulls seldom occur in flocks in winter. The Black-headed Gull has become increasingly common from Newfoundland to Maryland and even farther south on the Atlantic coast. With recent records on both coasts of Florida and even inland in Mississippi, it is to be expected on the northern Gulf coast. This record places the species only on the hypothetical list for Alabama. Those seeking to substantiate this record with further sight records or photographic evidence should read the field guides, especially the European ones, carefully as I did. Then, between November and April, its period of occurrence in Maryland, look for a Laughing Gull that has Bonaparte's wing markings.

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BROWN PELICANS REPORTED AT EUFAULA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Brent Ortego

Prior to 1957, the Brown Pelican (Pelecanus occidentalis) was abundant during the whole year on the Alabama Gulf coast. It frequented all saltwater habitats and occasionally occurred inland over the coastal plains of Alabama after winter storms. From 1959 to 1963, no Brown Pelicans were reported in Alabama. In 1973, these birds were again observed in numbers higher than 100 (Imhof, 1976. Alabama Birds: 62).

During early November, 1977, a University of Georgia wildlife student reported that he observed a Brown Pelican flying low over the Chattahoochee River at Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge. At first I was highly skeptical of this report because there has not been an inland sighting of this species