

FIRST RECORD OF A SLATY-BACKED GULL *LARUS SCHISTISAGUS* FOR INDONESIA

MUHAMMAD IQBAL¹ & ANDI ADMIRAL ALBAYQUNI²

¹KPB-SOS, Jalan Tanjung api-api km 9 Komplek P and K Blok E 1 Palembang 30152, Indonesia (kpbsos26@yahoo.com)

²Lombok Wildlife Photography. Jl. Arya Banjar Getas BTN Graha Mutiara Kav 11, No. 5. Ampenan, Mataram, Indonesia

Received 15 February 2016; accepted 28 March 2016

The Slaty-backed gull *Larus schistisagus* is a large, dark-backed gull that breeds in northeastern Asia. It winters in ice-free regions from the Commander Islands and Hokkaido southward in the Sea of Japan to Korea and Bohai Gulf and on

the Pacific coast to Nansei Shoto and Taiwan; occasionally it occurs along the coast of China (Olsen & Larsson 2003, Brazil 2009). The species has been reported as a vagrant to northern North America, mainly between southern Alaska and Oregon, with scattered records in Ontario, Quebec, Missouri, Texas and Hawaii (Burger & Gochfeld 1996, Olsen & Larsson 2003). It was reported from Cooktown, Australia (Carter *et al.* 2008, Jeff Davies pers. comm.) in 2008, but to date no information exists for this species in southeast (SE) Asia or Indonesian waters, and it is considered extralimital in the region (Sukmantoro *et al.* 2007, Pratt & Beehler 2015). Here we report the occurrence of a Slaty-backed Gull on Lombok Island, Indonesia.

During 8–12 February 2016, an unidentified gull was observed and photographed on Ampenan beach (8°34'15.31"S, 116°4'19.25"E), Lombok Island, West Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia. On 17 February 2016, we revisited Ampenan beach, but the unidentified gull was not present. It was tentatively identified as a Heuglin's Gull *L. fuscus heuglini*. However, identification of juvenile gulls is difficult and represents one of the greatest challenges in birding (Harrison 1985, Robson 2011), and many species need to be considered before a final determination is made. The gull showed typical first winter plumage for a Heuglin's Gull, including a black bill, pinkish legs, and a worn appearance (Fig. 1). However, it was not a Heuglin's Gull, nor did it come from the *cachinnans* taxon, as it had a plain dark underwing. The bird was similar to a Mongolian Gull *L. vegae mongolicus*; however, this species does not have the simple pattern on the coverts (although worn and faded) that was observed on the gull in question (Fig. 1), and structurally it did not appear like the *mongolicus* taxon. We also considered the Steppe Gull *L. fuscus barabensis* and Caspian Gull *L. cachinnans*, as they are known to have a darker underwing, but the bird in question lacked the typical bars and notches of the Steppe Gull. We quickly ruled out Vega Gull *L. vegae*, as this species resembles a European Herring Gull *L. argentatus*, and the gull in question did not.

Because of the challenges of identifying the gull correctly, we shared a series of photos on the Pacific Seabird Group Listserver and on "Pelagics seabirds birding worldwide," a global Facebook group. This spurred further discussion with seabird experts, suggesting that the observed larid was a Slaty-backed Gull.

We finally confirmed the bird was a Slaty-backed Gull from the plain dark underwing without bars or notching to the coverts and auxiliaries, and the combination of a white head and breast and brown belly. Its underwing was the typical coloration of a late first winter-spring Slaty-backed Gull (Fig. 1). There was some white at the base of the outer rectrices, but in Slaty-backed Gulls this is not uncommon (Jeff Davies & Michiaki Ujihara, pers. comm.).

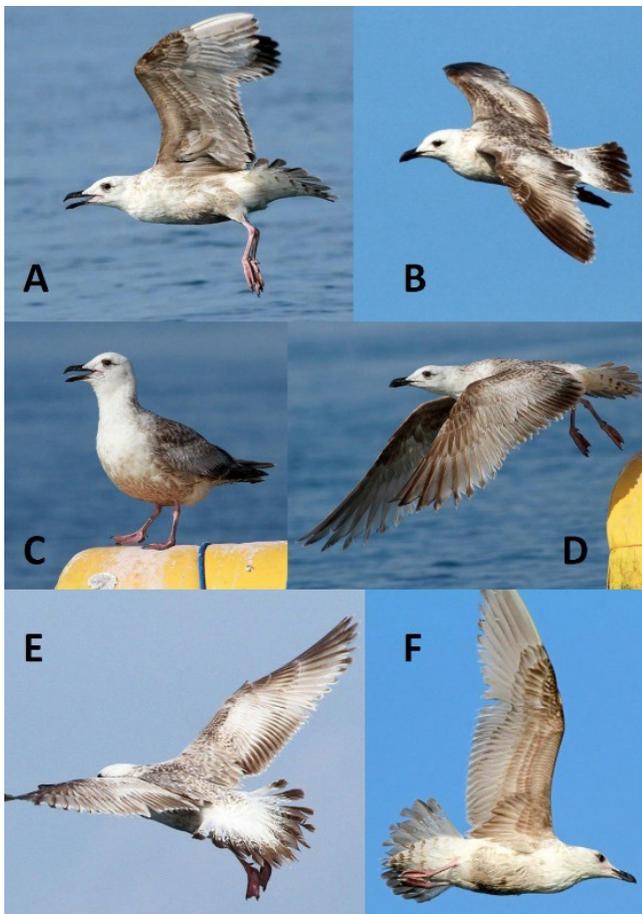


Fig. 1. First Slaty-Backed Gull recorded in Indonesia, Ampenan beach, Lombok, Indonesia, 8 February 2016. (A) The bird shows plain dark underwing, which has no bars or notching of the coverts and auxiliaries; (B) worn and faded upperpart and upperwing clearly seen in flight; (C) black bill, reddish legs and worn plumage typical of first-winter gull; (D) very simple pattern on the coverts, although worn and faded; (E) the tail has a degree of white at base of outer rectrices, which is unusual but not rare in Slaty-backed Gulls; (F) combination of white head-breast and brown-belly underwing is typical coloration of late first winter-spring Slaty-backed Gull. (all photos: Andi Albayquni).

Overall, a combination of the greater extent of the primaries, uniformity of the underwing, general body structure, and, most notably, the great expanse of the secondaries visible below the greater coverts identified this bird as a first-year Slaty-backed Gull in winter plumage.

The occurrence of a Slaty-backed Gull on Lombok Island is the first record of this species in Indonesia and the southernmost record for this larid. We had not initially considered this species in our tentative identification, as this species has been seen only once before in SE Asia, on 5 November 1991 in the Philippines (Davao Gulf, Mindanao; Kennedy *et al.* 2000). It has not been reported in SE Asia since (Robson 2011, Jayarajasingam & Pearson 2012, Goes 2013, Phillipps & Phillipps 2014). Owing to difficulties in the identification of gulls, and juvenile gulls in particular, it is possible that Slaty-backed Gulls have been overlooked in SE Asia in the past. Further studies of gulls in Indonesian waters are needed to clarify the status of this species and other gulls in Indonesia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank friends from the “Pelagics seabirds birding worldwide” Facebook group and the Pacific Seabird Group listserv for discussions sharing their experiences, and confirming the gull’s identification. We thank Abe Borke, Andy Webb, Christopher (Chris) Gibbins, Jeff Davies, Khaleb Jordan, Michiaki Ujihara, Oscar Johnson, and Verena Gill. We also thank Colin Trainor, James Eaton, Paulo Alves, Yong Ding Li, and our friend from the “Pengamat Burung Indonesia” Facebook group for preliminary identification of this species. Finally, we are grateful to the editors of *Marine Ornithology*, Verena Gill, and Jeff Davies for comments on an earlier draft.

REFERENCES

- BRAZIL, M. 2009. *The Birds of East Asia*. Princeton, US: Princeton University Press.
- BURGER, J. & GOCHFELD, M. 1996. *Family Laridae (Gulls)*. In: DEL HOYO, J., ELLIOTT, A. & SARGATAL, J. (Eds.) *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. Vol. 3. Barcelona, Spain: Lynx Edicions. pp. 572-623.
- CARTER, M., CLARKE, R. & DAVIES, J. *Submission No 797: Slaty-backed Gull Larus schistisagus Cooktown, QLD. 14th February 2008 to 4th April 2008*. [Available online at: <http://birdlife.org.au/documents/barc/SUMM797.htm>. Accessed 17 February 2016].
- GOES, F. 2013. *The Birds of Cambodia: An Annotated Checklist*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Fauna and Flora International, Cambodia Programme.
- HARRISON, P. 1985. *Seabirds, an Identification Guide*. London, UK: Croom Helm.
- JAYARAJASINGAM, A. & PEARSON, A. 2012. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- KENNEDY, R.S., GONZALES, P.C., DICKINSON, E.C., MIRANDA, H.C. & FISHER, T.H. 2000. *A Guide to the Birds of the Philippines*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- OLSEN, K.M. & LARSSON, H. 2003. *Gulls of Europe, Asia and North America*. London, UK: Christopher Helm.
- PHILLIPPS, Q. & PHILLIPPS, K. 2014. *Phillipps' Field Guide to the Birds of Borneo*. Oxford, UK: John Beaufoy Publishing Ltd.
- PRATT, T.K. & BEEHLER, B.M. 2015. *Birds of New Guinea*, 2nd edition. Princeton, US: Princeton University Press.
- SUKMANTORO, W., IRHAM, M., NOVARINO, W., HASUDUNGAN, F., KEMP, N. & MUCHTAR, M. 2007. *Daftar burung Indonesia no. 2*. Bogor, Indonesia: Indonesian Ornithologists' Union. (In Indonesian.)