



Answer to Snap Judgment No. 1

The flying gull (above) pictured first on the back cover of the February 1979 *Continental Birdlife* is — as stated in the original caption — of a regularly occurring North American species. This information makes it possible to declare immediately that the bird is an immature, since no North American gull (except the very dark Heermann's *Larus heermanni*) has conspicuous black on the tail when fully adult. Faced with the problem of identifying this immature gull, with no clues as to its size, flight action, or exact location, our process-of-elimination solution might run as follows:

The tail-band quickly rules out all of the larger gulls, as it is too dark for the paler species (e.g., Glaucous Gull *L. hyperboreus*, Iceland Gull *L. glaucooides*) and too sharply defined for the others (e.g., Herring Gull *L. argentatus*). Several of the smaller gulls have distinct black tail-bands, but most of these are eliminated by the very uniform inner portion of the wing on the pictured bird: most have either a contrasting dark diagonal bar (carpal bar) crossing this area (e.g., Bonaparte's Gull *L. philadelphia*, Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*) or pale greater secondary coverts forming a "pale mid-wing panel" (e.g., Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*). In fact, the combination of relatively *unpatterned wings*, white rump, and *sharply demarcated black tail-band* quickly narrows the field to two species: Laughing Gull *L. atricilla* and Franklin's Gull *L. pipixcan*.

Most currently available bird guides have suggested that immatures of these two species cannot be safely distinguished afield, but there are actually several reliable differences. Observers with enough comparative experience can separate the two on the basis of head and bill shape, since the large bill and low sloping forehead of the Laughing create a contour very different from the smaller bill and higher peaked forehead of the Franklin's; however, the angle of the bird in the photograph makes this difficult to judge. With a more direct side view, we might also confidently identify the pictured bird by its head pattern, as Franklin's Gulls in all non-breeding plumages

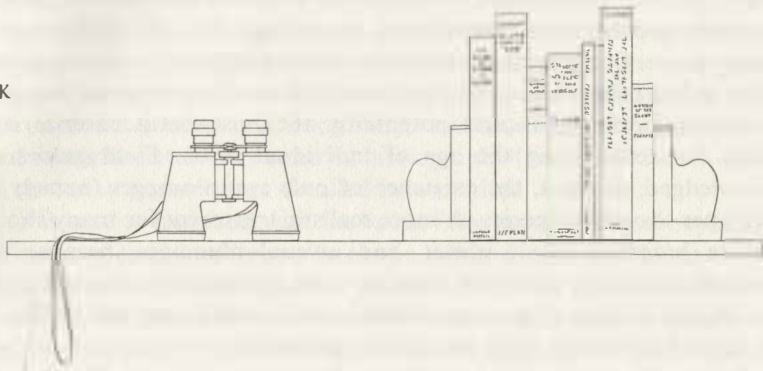
display a clear-cut "half-hooded" effect, with very dark ear-coverts and rear part of crown. However, some Laughings can show a suggestion of this pattern; and we might question to what extent the apparent dark areas on the head in the photograph are caused by shadows. But there can be no question about the *tail-pattern* in the photo, and this is the best mark of all. Laughing Gulls in juvenal and first-year plumages display a rather broad black subterminal band crossing all of the rectrices, as illustrated in various field guides. The tail-pattern of juvenile and first-winter Franklin's Gulls, which has rarely been depicted correctly, is quite different: the black subterminal band is slightly narrower than that of the Laughing, and it tapers in width from the center toward the outer edge, so that the *outermost rectrix* on each side is almost always *entirely white*. This may be seen clearly in the photograph.

The juvenile **Franklin's Gull** featured here was photographed by Scott Terrill on the California-Arizona border at the upper end of Lake Havasu on 25 August 1978.

Reviews

Edited by

ELAINE COOK



Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holarctic Waders — Anthony J. Prater, John H. Marchant, and Juhani Vuorinen. 1977. Tring, Hertfordshire: British Trust for Ornithology. *their* Field Guide 17. 168 pp., illus., 17 plates (1 color). £2.50.

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Audubon House Bookstore
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price \$8.95 plus \$1.00 shipping.

Of the literally hundreds of bird books published annually in the English language, most have no substantial effect upon field ornithology in North America. This slim volume seems destined to be an exception. Ten years from now, no doubt, a more sophisticated generation of shorebird-watchers will look back upon the publication of *Holarctic Waders* as the turning point.

The previous "field guides" by the British Trust for Ornithology, while excellent, have had little application on this side of the Atlantic. But the shorebirds (plovers, sandpipers and their allies, or "waders" in the British parlance) present a special case.