

FIRST RECORD OF FRANKLIN'S GULL *LEUCOCEPHALUS PIPIXCAN* FROM ANTARCTICA

MARK MAFTEI

High Arctic Gull Research Group, Bamfield, BC V0R 1B0, Canada (mark.maftei@gmail.com)

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A second-cycle Franklin's Gull *Leucocephalus pipixcan* was seen and photographed in Wilhelmina Bay on the western coast of the Antarctic Peninsula on 2 March 2013. This is the first record of this species in Antarctica, one of several vagrant species seen in that part of the continent and associated islands (e.g., Trivelpiece *et al.* 1987).

While cruising in a small Zodiac inflatable boat through brash ice near the northwestern end of Wilhelmina Bay (64°36.757'S, 62°22.524'W) on 2 March 2013, I observed a small, black-hooded gull perched on a low stony reef alongside an adult Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*. The latter is the only regularly occurring gull in Antarctica, and the presence of a different species attracted my immediate attention. Approaching to within about 5 m, it was possible to obtain a number of diagnostic photographs. During the approximately 15 min the bird was under observation, it called once, uttering a sharp nasal "yeau" before taking flight and landing on the water nearby amid a feeding flock of Antarctic Terns *Sterna vitatta*.

The bird was initially suspected to be a Brown-hooded Gull *Chroicocephalus maculipennis*, a relatively common species in the coastal waters of southern South America as well as nearby sub-Antarctic islands, such as the Falkland Islands (Kovacs *et al.* 2005). However, subsequent analysis of multiple photographs supported the unequivocal identification of the bird as an alternate-plumage second-cycle Franklin's Gull (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Franklin's Gull in second-cycle alternate plumage, Wilhelmina Bay, 2 March 2013. The dark hood and pattern to the outer primaries is diagnostic of Franklin's Gull, and the extensive black in the primaries and black streaks on the primary coverts indicate a second-cycle individual.

Franklin's Gull breeds in the prairies of Canada and the northern United States and winters on the Pacific coast of Peru and northern Chile. Beyond this core winter range, small flocks have been reported from southern Argentina, particularly along the extreme southeastern Atlantic coast (Kovacs *et al.* 2005, Howell & Dunn 2007), and individuals are very rarely seen as far south as Tierra del Fuego, where they are considered casual (Howell & Dunn 2007) or extralimital (Kovacs *et al.* 2005). The species has been recorded from the Falkland Islands (Bourne & Curtis 1986), and (anecdotally) from the Drake Passage north of the South Shetland Islands, as well as the South Orkney Islands (Signy Island) (Couve & Vidal 2003). As a trans-equatorial migrant regularly moving across a broad range, Franklin's Gull has also, not surprisingly, been recorded as a vagrant in many far-flung places. Indeed, well-documented records exist from Europe (Hoogendoorn & Steinhaus 1990, Rogers 2003), Australasia (New Zealand: Onley & Schweigman 2004, Australia: Corben & Czechura 1988), and even central Asia (Kazakhstan: Wassink *et al.* 2011). Other records from around the world are summarized by Burger & Gochfield (2009).

Although there is no way to ascertain whether the Franklin's Gull reported here was ship-assisted, it seems unlikely. Wilhelmina Bay is regularly visited by chartered cruise ships originating in southern Argentina, but these typically depart from Ushuaia, where the species is extremely rare. Furthermore, such ships invariably first stop in the South Shetland Islands and/or the northern Antarctic Peninsula; any birds that had alighted on the ship while it was at sea would be expected to depart at these locations.

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