

## NOTES

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## YELLOW-NOSED ALBATROSS SPECIMEN FROM KEY LARGO

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On the morning of 27 May 1992 Mark Wheaton noticed a large black-and-white bird sitting in the median of U.S. Highway 1 opposite his business in Key Largo, Monroe County, Florida. He called Lisa Sprigins, who captured the bird and transported it to the Florida Keys Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center, also on Key Largo. Laura Quinn, director of the rehabilitation center, tentatively identified the bird as an albatross. It had no obvious injuries, other than superficial abrasions on the feet, but seemed weak and lethargic. The bird was alert and aware of its surroundings, but rested on its tarsi, and walked seldom and with difficulty.

I examined and photographed the bird later that day (Fig. 1). It was clearly a mollymawk, among the smallest albatrosses, with wingspans of 175 to 240 cm. These birds are largely white, with dark wings, back, and tail. Some have gray heads as well. The mollymawks largely inhabit the subtropical, temperate, subantarctic, and antarctic waters of the southern hemisphere. The five to seven species of mollymawks are generally similar in appearance, but can be distinguished by bill color and pattern, head plumage, and underwing pattern. Three species of mollymawks have been documented in the north Atlantic, and two of these, the Yellow-nosed Albatross (*D. chlororhynchos*) and the Black-browed Albatross (*D. melanophris*) occur with some regularity (Bourne 1967, McDaniel 1973). The Key Largo bird had a largely black bill, with some yellow on the dorsal plate and nail. Only two species of mollymawks, the Yellow-nosed Albatross and the Grayheaded Albatross (*D. chrysostoma*) have largely black bills. The immaculate head and narrow dark edgings to the white underwings identify the bird as a Yellow-nosed Albatross. Juvenile Yellow-nosed Albatrosses have completely black bills, and adults have black bills with a yellow or orange dorsal plate and nail, together forming a stripe down the culmen from the forehead to the bill tip. The Key Largo bird's bill was mostly black with some yellow, primarily on the nail and near the base of the bill, so I suspect that it is a subadult. The weight (1.95 kg) was within the range of 1.87 - 2.5 kg ( $N = 3$ ) reported by Palmer (1962), and the bird did not seem emaciated, but it died during the night of 28-29 May. The specimen is now at Archbold Biological Station, where it is preserved as a study skin (GEW 5866). It was a male (testes white, 8X2mm) with a wingspan of 199.4 cm. It had a moderate coating of subcutaneous fat, and was molting breast feathers at the time of death.

This is the third report and first specimen of a Yellow-nosed Albatross from Florida. Johnnie Johnson reported one off the coast of Brevard Co. 13 July 1958 (Stevenson 1958, Cruickshank 1980). The first verified record was of a bird photographed at the St. Marks Light by G.W. Valpey-Toussignant on 3 July 1983 (Paul 1983)

Yellow-nosed Albatrosses breed on a few south temperate to subantarctic islands in the southern Atlantic (Tristan da Cunha group, and Gough) and Indian Oceans (St. Paul, Amsterdam, Prince Edward, Crozets), and range at sea from the Atlantic coast of South America east through the southern Atlantic and Indian oceans to Australia and New Zealand (Palmer 1962, AOU 1983, Harrison 1983). Some authors regard the birds



Figure 1. Yellow-nosed Albatross at the Florida Keys Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center, 27 May 1992.

breeding in the Indian Ocean as a subspecies *D. c. bassi*, separate from *D. c. chlororhynchos* of the Atlantic, but the described plumage differences appear minor and confounded by wear (Murphy 1936), and subadults may not be separable.

Yellow-nosed Albatrosses have been known from the North Atlantic at least from 1885 (Bourne 1967). McDaniel (1973) reviewed albatross records from the western North Atlantic. He found 13 reports of *D. chlororhynchos*: three specimens plus a feather, two photographic records, and seven sightings. I searched the Changing Seasons reports in *American Birds* from 1972 through 1991 for all regions along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, and found 12 reports of Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, 10 reports of Black-browed Albatrosses (including three of two birds), and four reports of unidentified albatrosses. Fifteen of the 26 reports were from maritime Canada and New England, six were from Long Island through Virginia, and only five were from the southeast coast and Gulf of Mexico. Oddly, 22 of the reports occurred between 1972 and 1981, and only four since then. This dearth of albatross sightings in the last decade may be related to the general decline seen in procellariiform bird numbers off New England and maritime Canada as commercial fisheries there have declined. Alternatively the reduction in reports could reflect real population declines in these species or a reduced frequency of trans-equatorial vagrancy. Population declines, apparently resulting from increased subadult and adult mortality of birds caught in longline fisheries, have been reported for other southern albatrosses (Prince et al. 1994).

The Florida Keys Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center has been extremely cooperative in making their unavoidable mortality records and specimens available for scientific study. Roger Clapp and an anonymous reviewer made useful comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript.

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