

## FIRST JANUARY SIGHTING IN THE UNITED STATES OF A YELLOW-NOSED ALBATROSS

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Along the western shore of the North Atlantic, the Yellow-nosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchos* is considered a "casual vagrant" (Clapp et al. 1982) or "casual or accidental" (A.O.U. 1983) with 25 reports from Canada and the United States during April-October with most clustered in July and August (Hoffman 1994, McDaniel 1973). Only three reports exist for Florida: a sight report off Brevard County by J. Johnson on 13 July 1958 (Stevenson 1958), a photographic record of a bird at St. Marks Natl. Wildl. Ref. by G. Valpey-Toussignant on 3 July 1983 (Paul 1983), and a specimen record from Key Largo by W. Hoffman on 27 May 1992 (Langridge 1992, Hoffman 1994). The St. Marks and Key Largo records were made from land.

From the east end of Lake Worth Pier, Palm Beach County, Florida, at 0750 on 5 January 1995, I identified an albatross as a Yellow-nosed using 10× 40× Zeiss binoculars. It was a very cloudy day at 61° and with 36 kph north winds. At about 152 m from the pier, the gliding albatross slipped in from the northeast and leisurely wove its way among three, 6 or 7-m long fishing boats and much smaller gulls for several minutes before unhurriedly working its way south. The albatross seldom rose more than a few feet above the water. This large bird flapped its wings only twice and glided during most of the observing time with its long, narrow wings held vertically to the water. Excellent views were seen of both surfaces of the wings, especially the ventral area which is important for identification.

Ventrally, the long, narrow wings were white with a narrow black margin along each leading edge; primaries were black. The body was white. Near the upper left breast and lower throat area was a light-gray smudge. I could see no color on the dark bill. Dorsally, the wings and back were dark and the rump and head were white.

I compared my field drawings and notes with many published illustrations and descriptions. As the Black-browed Albatross *D. melanophris*, with only sight reports, and the Yellow-nosed Albatross are the only albatrosses reported in the western North Atlantic (A.O.U. 1983), separating the two species at a distance is straightforward in that the Black-browed Albatross has more black on the ventral surface of the wing than does the Yellow-nosed Albatross. Ventrally, the very narrow black margin on the leading edge of the all-white wing except for the black primaries eliminated the Black-browed from consideration.

Yellow-nosed Albatrosses ". . . are most likely to occur along the margin of the Continental Shelf . . ." (Clapp et al. 1982). As the continental shelf margin is near the shore along Palm Beach County, this albatross's appearance at this location would seem credible. Less than 1.6 k from shore the depth of the ocean is well over 100 fathoms and drops sharply thereafter (U.S. Geol. Sur. 1946).

The Yellow-nosed Albatross normally breeds from August through May in the South Atlantic (Harrison 1983) so any winter occurrence in the North Atlantic is exceptional. The latest fall date for this species was a late October bird found injured in 1976 in Texas (Webster 1976) and the earliest spring sighting was in Maine on 21 March 1960 (McDaniel 1973). The only previous winter sighting in the U.S. was a bird photographed by R. Rowlett on 1 February 1974 off Ocean City, Maryland (Scott and Cutler 1975). My observation is the first January sighting, the second winter U.S. sighting, and the fourth overall for Florida.

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