

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

FIRST DOCUMENTED RECORD OF SABINE'S GULL IN MISSISSIPPI

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We spotted a Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*) at about 0900 on 9 August 1988 as it landed on the beach at Clermont Harbor, Hancock County, Mississippi. We watched it for about 20 minutes as it stood or lay on the sand, from as close as 8 m through 7X and 8X binoculars and 22X spotting scopes. Photographs (color slides and color and black-and-white prints) were taken of the bird. Heavy overcast provided mediocre light. Strong winds were from the south; the temperature was about 78 degrees F. Tropical Storm Beryl was moving ashore west of New Orleans.

We immediately identified the bird as a Sabine's Gull due to its wing pattern. It was in first-summer plumage: the dark gray hood was finely speckled white, the black collar was splotchy and incomplete at the throat and nape, the tail was completely white, the white primary tips were small, and the bill was entirely dark. All of these marks may be seen in the photographs.

We ruled out immature Little (*Larus minutus*) and Ross' (*Rhodostethis rosea*) gulls and immature Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) by the lack of black on the inner wing and tail and the presence of a hood (National Geographic Society 1987).

We first noticed the Sabine's Gull as it was landing and did not see the direction from which it came. It stood among a group of about 30 Larids including: Laughing Gull (*L. atricilla*), Gull-billed (*Sterna nilotica*), Caspian (*S. caspia*), Sandwich (*S. sandvicensis*), Common (*S. hirundo*), Forster's (*S. forsteri*), Least (*S. antillarum*), and Black (*Chlidonias niger*) terns, and Black

Skimmers (*Rynchops niger*). The Sabine's Gull preened, and twice lay upon the sand, although it did not tuck its head. The Sabine's Gull was less skittish than the other larids, not flying when Hodges approached to within 8 m. It once flew about 1 meter, returning to the beach. After we returned to our car, the bird left with a group of skimmers and was last seen flying westward along the beach. Hodges had previously seen the species in Texas and the Pacific Ocean, and Toups had seen it in coastal California.

This is the second record of Sabine's Gull for the state. An immature bird was sighted on 14 July 1964, 3 miles WNW of Ship Island, Harrison County (Toups and Jackson 1987). Duncan and Havard (1980) list 12 other records for the northern Gulf coast, all from Texas, Louisiana, and Alabama. Sabine's Gull breeds in the Arctic and winters at sea in the southern Atlantic and Pacific oceans (Harrison 1983).

Literature Cited

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