

Blue-faced Booby Near Horn Island, Mississippi

C. Dwight Cooley, Jerome A. Jackson, and Donald K. Cavin

Department of Biological Sciences
Mississippi State University
Mississippi State, MS 39762

At approximately 16:00 on 6 July 1979 while enroute from Horn Island to the spoil island off the west tip of Petit Bois Island, Jackson Co., Mississippi, we observed a Blue-faced Booby (Sula dactylatra) flying at approximately 15 m over Mississippi Sound near the east tip of Horn Island. We first observed the booby 250 m west of our position and followed the bird as it flew to the east out of sight past the spoil island. At one point it was well within 50 m and all field marks were noted using 7 x 35 mm binoculars. At the time of the sighting the sky was clear, temperature 90°F, and winds were from the southeast at 5 mph.

Lighting conditions were excellent and the following field marks were noted as the bird flew leisurely by, allowing front, side, and back views: large, immature booby with slow, strong wingbeats. Head uniformly brown down the neck to a point anterior to a line with the wings. Dorsally, the primaries and secondaries were black with the anterior portion of the wings brown with small white spots. The back region was brown with small flecks of white, extending back to the upper tail coverts. The upper tail coverts were light and the rectrices dark, giving the appearance of a light tail patch bordered on the front by the brown back and on the back and sides by the dark rectrices. The belly was light and the underwings appeared much the same as the upper wings. The brown head and back and the light belly and area anterior to the wings gave the impression of a light collar and a dark hood, characteristic of immature Blue-faced Boobies. In flight the bird held its head at a 45° angle to the water, a behavioral pattern noted by Cooley in both adult and immature boobies on several occasions off the Alabama coast.

This is the second sight record for the state, the other was of five adults on 27 September 1978 by Toups and Morgan (Jackson and Cooley, Miss. Kite, 8:49, 1978). There are numerous sightings from other areas along the northern Gulf Coast and the species is now considered a regular visitor to the region (T.A. Imhof, pers. comm.).