

Immature Little Gull in South America

A first record for the continent

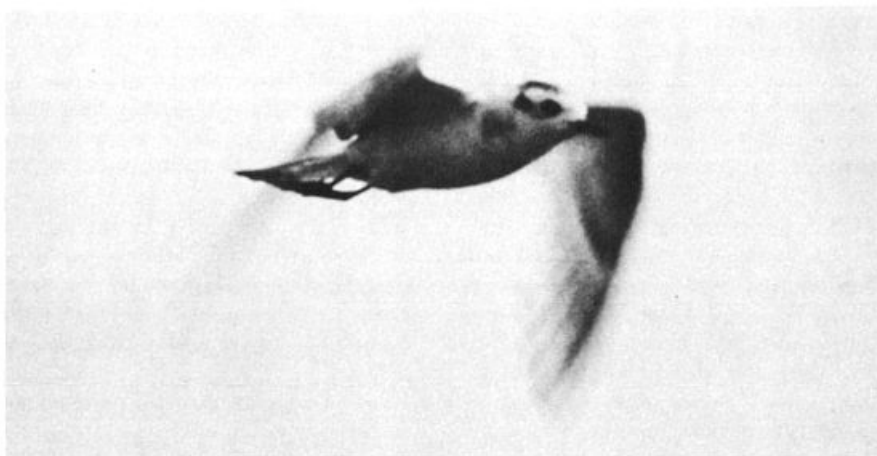
Hans Blokpoel, Luis-German Naranjo, and Gaston D. Tessier

THE BREEDING RANGE of the Little Gull (*Larus minutus*) is discontinuous and encompasses parts of northern Europe and northern Asia (Voous 1960). In Europe the main breeding range lies in southern Finland and western U.S.S.R., but small breeding colonies have also been found in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Britain (Hutchinson and Neath 1978, Moller 1978, Veen 1980). In the United Kingdom and Ireland numbers of migrant Little Gulls have increased, presumably due to an increase in the breeding population east of the Baltic (Hutchinson and Neath 1978).

In eastern North America, the first Little Gull was collected in 1887, and the first documented nesting in the New World occurred near Oshawa, Ontario, in 1962 (Scott 1963). Since then the species has nested in the Great Lakes area near Oshawa in 1963 (Tozer and Richards 1974); at Rondeau, Ontario, in 1971 (Tozer and Richards 1974); near Whitby, Ontario, in 1971 and 1972 (Tozer and Richards 1974); near Green Bay, Wisconsin, in 1975 (Tessen 1975); and most likely also at Long Point, Ontario, in 1975 (Goodwin 1975). The species is regularly seen in small numbers in the Great Lakes area, from Duluth to the St. Lawrence River, as well as along the East Coast from Newfoundland south to New Jersey.

Along the West Coast, Little Gulls were first reported in California in 1968 (McCaskie 1969) and have since been observed regularly along the southwestern coast of British Columbia (Johnson and Adams 1977).

Elsewhere in North America the species has been observed occasionally in widely separated locations: Komakuk Beach DEW Station, Yukon Territory, in 1975 (Johnson and Adams 1977); Regina, Saskatchewan, in 1973 (Switzer 1974); Churchill, Manitoba, in 1970



(Pittaway and Nero 1971); Lake Athabasca, Alberta, in 1962 (Nero 1963); and Volusia County, Florida, in 1972 (Carleton 1972).

On February 13, 1983 from 1310 to 1330 hours we observed a Little Gull on a mud flat on Buenaventura Bay near Buenaventura, on the Pacific coast of Colombia. Buenaventura Bay is open to the ocean between Punta Bazan (3°50'10"N, 77°10'45"W) and Punto Soldado (3°48'55"N, 77°10'40"W). The bay's total surface is about 16 km² and its depth varies between two and ten meters. At low tide, large mudflats ("bajos") are exposed along the mangrove-lined coast. We observed the bird at the Bajo Pueblo Nuevo, which is located at the Buenaventura City coast.

We watched the bird from a small boat using binoculars (Leitz Trinovid, 10 × 40 mm; and Bushnell, 9 × 36 mm) and field guides (Robbins *et al.* 1966, Peterson 1980). The gull was standing on a mud flat close to a group of seven Laughing Gulls (*L. atricilla*) at a distance of 10-15 meters from us. When the captain of the boat began to feed the Laughing Gulls by throwing pieces of bread overboard, the Little Gull joined the feeding gulls, allowing us to watch and photograph the

bird in flight as well.

The Little Gull was much smaller than the Laughing Gulls and ternlike in its appearance and way of flying. The short thin bill was black, the eye dark, the head had a dark cap and a distinct dark dot behind the eye. The upper wings had the blackish zig-zag band illustrated by Robbins *et al.* (1966, p. 141) and Peterson (1980, p. 93). The underwings were light. The tail was square with a conspicuous black terminal band. One or two of the central tail feathers were either lacking (molted) or worn to the shaft. The legs were a dirty blackish red (as in Robbins *et al.* 1966), not yellowish gray as in Peterson (1980). The outer primaries were sooty brown. We think that this bird was a Little Gull in its first winter.

After we had submitted an earlier version of this note, we learned that another party also saw a Little Gull in Buenaventura Harbour. On January 9, 1983, Bret Whitney, Robert S. Ridgely, and other members of the Victor Emanuel Nature Tour observed a first-winter Little Gull for 15-20 minutes during the late afternoon. The bird was observed using a 20× Bausch and Lomb telescope. It was resting on a mud flat near the small boats dock, some 100 meters away from the



Immature Little Gull, Buenaventura Bay, Columbia, February 13, 1983. Photos/L.-G. Naranjo.

observers. The gull was in the company of some Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*). We believe that the same bird was involved in both cases and, as far as we know, these observations constitute the first documented records of a Little Gull for South America.

These observations confirm the highly erratic occurrence of the Little Gull during the winter (Voous 1960). In its normal range it rarely appears in winter outside the temperate regions (Voous 1960),

but the above observations were made close to the equator. We were surprised that the Little Gull joined the Laughing Gulls feeding on bread, but feeding on human food scraps has been noted in the United Kingdom (Riddiford and Fletcher 1978). The presence of an immature bird on the Pacific coast of Colombia does nothing to help answer the question whether Little Gulls "colonized" North America via the North Atlantic or via the Bering Sea (see Baillie 1951, Bruun

1968, Johnson and Adams 1977, Hutchinson and Neath 1978). Given the species' erratic occurrence and wide wanderings, it may well be that both routes of colonization were followed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WE THANK W. Earl Godfrey (National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa), who examined our photographs and confirmed our identification. We are also grateful to Bret Whitney and Robert S. Ridgely for allowing us to use their observations in this note.

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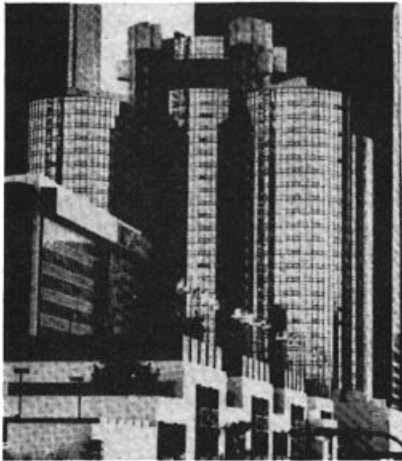
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