

plumage patterns of the female Red-bellied and Golden-fronted woodpeckers are similar. Obviously, the tail pattern is often overlooked as an important field mark. Ironically, one of the more authoritative bird guides on the market, *Master Guide to Birding*, incorrectly describes the Golden-fronted Woodpecker as having a black and white "barred" central tail pattern. The barred, central tail pattern is found *only* in the Red-bellied and not in the Golden-fronted. Several other field guides, while showing the barred, central tail feathers in their representations of the Red-bellied Woodpecker, fail to point these out as field marks. This oversight should be corrected in future guides to eliminate further misidentifications.

However, it is my opinion that this specimen does not exhibit xanthochromism. Only the areas of its body that would normally be red in a female Red-bellied are yellow, not the entire head and belly. In Volker (1964) as cited in Welty (1982), a deficient biochemical pathway was discovered as the cause of yellow plumage found on normally red plumaged birds. Whether or not a deficient pathway was the cause of the

yellow plumage in the specimen here described is beyond the scope of this note.

This mutant, female Red-bellied was observed for several months, and during this time, several interesting observations were recorded. On March 3, 1984, a normal male Red-bellied Woodpecker chased her for several minutes. On March 24, it was discovered that she and a male were sharing a nest or roost hole. Owing to a storm, their hole was destroyed and they relocated and excavated another hole approximately 100 meters from their previous hole. In early April, 1984, the male attempted to copulate with her. This series of observations has interesting implications as to the importance of plumage coloration with respect to mate selection in Red-bellied Woodpeckers. In this case, the abnormal coloration of the female appeared to have little consequence on her ability to attract a mate.

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## First record of Common Black-headed Gulls breeding in the United States



Photo/Robert C. Humphrey.

**Since it was first recorded nesting in Iceland in 1911, this western European gull has steadily expanded its range across the North Atlantic into North America.**

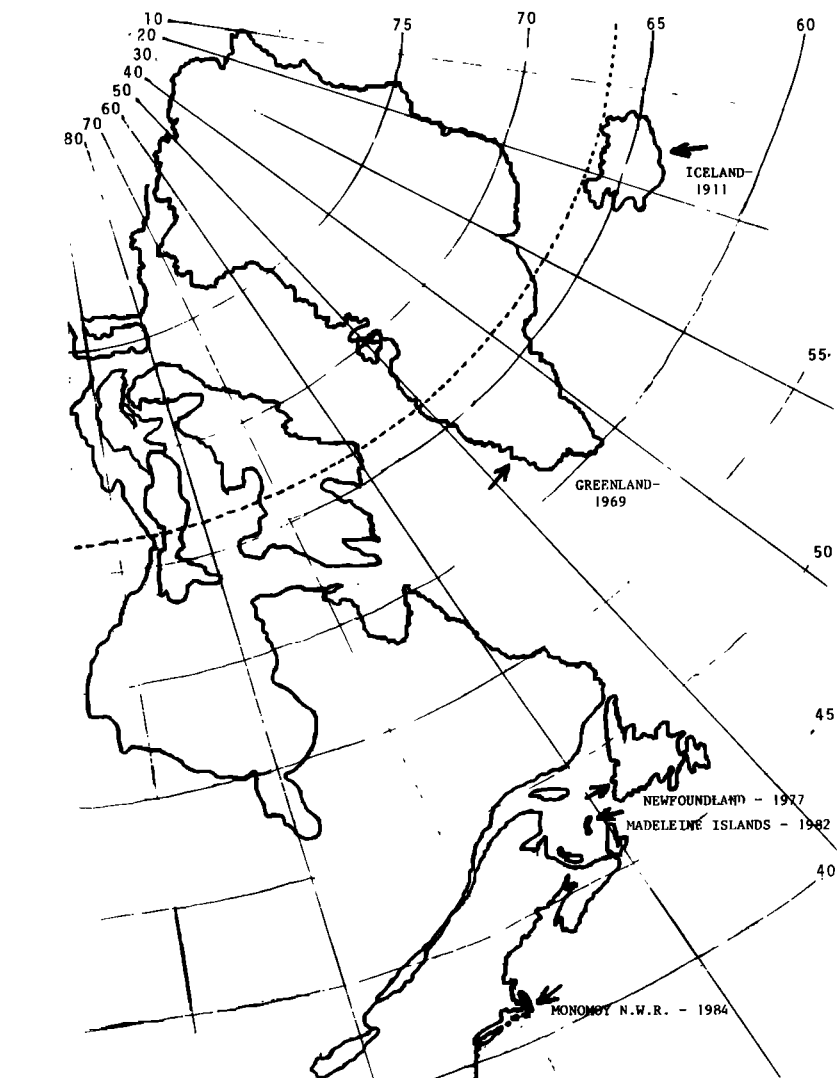
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ON MAY 28, 1983, AN ADULT COMMON Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*), was observed on territory within a colony of nesting Laughing Gulls (*L. atricilla*), at Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge (41°38'N, 69°58'W), Chatham, Massachusetts. The Common Black-headed Gull defended its territory and the vertical air space above it, calling from both locations. The territory was vigorously defended until June 9, when an adult Laughing Gull displaced the black-headed gull. The following day the black-headed gull established a new territory approximately 4 meters from the original site. This territory was occupied and defended until June 26, and then abandoned. A small nest was discovered at this site, but no construction was observed. The Common Black-headed Gull remained on the island throughout the summer feeding and roosting on nearby tidal flats.

A second Common Black-headed Gull, in first-summer plumage (Grant 1982), was also observed during the summer of 1983. However, it was never seen associating with the adult bird.

The following year, on May 8, 1984, an adult Common Black-headed Gull was again observed at the same territory originally occupied in 1983. On May 11, 1984, a pair of adult Common Black-headed Gulls was observed defending this territory. The pair was observed daily and a nest of dried Beach Grass (*Ammophila breviligulata*) was discovered May 21.

Two eggs were laid, which we marked A and B in order to determine incubation periods. Egg A was found May 24 and measured 5.016 centimeters (length) × 3.566 centimeters (width). Egg B was found on May 27 and measured 5.022 centimeters (length) × 3.546 centimeters (width). The eggs began to hatch synchronously, but the chicks were found dead and partially emerged from the eggs on June 26. Us-



**Figure 1.** Expansion of Common Black-headed Gulls across the North Atlantic with years of first known nestings.

ing egg B as an indicator of the incubation period (Van Tyne and Berger 1959, Welty 1975), incubation was 31 days. The shell and chick remains were collected and deposited at the Northeastern University Museum, Boston, Massachusetts.

Exposure to heavy rains (5.59 centimeters) on the day and night of June 26 was believed the cause of the chick mortality. An indirect cause may have been night desertion by the adults, resulting in prolonged exposure of the emerging chicks. Night desertion in Laughing Gull and Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) colonies on Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge is a frequent occurrence associated with owl predation (Nisbet 1975, Nisbet and Welton

1984, Holt 1982, Holt and Lortie 1983). The 31-day incubation period suggests night desertion, as incubation periods of 20–24 days (Fisher and Lockley 1954), and 23–26 days (Cramp *et al.* 1983), have been reported for Common Black-headed Gulls elsewhere.

The black-headed gulls remained at the nest site until July 4, during which time they pulled grasses from the nest bowl and piled them on top or to the sides of the nest, thus destroying it. The birds then moved from the nest site and frequented an area along the colony boundary (approximately 2 meters distant) until mid-August. During this period they were observed walking the colony boundary, resting, and occasionally calling and courting.

During this century, concurrent with a dramatic population increase throughout western Europe (Cramp *et al.* 1983), Common Black-headed Gulls have expanded steadily across the North Atlantic into North America (Fig. 1). Nesting was first recorded in Iceland in 1911 and by 1975 the population there had increased to an estimated 10,000 pairs (Cramp *et al.* 1983). Nesting was first recorded in Greenland in 1969 (Cramp *et al.* 1983). The first North American record of occurrence for the Common Black-headed Gull was of a male in winter plumage collected in Newburyport, Massachusetts, on January 26, 1930 (Emilio 1929). In 1963, Erskine documented the species' increase along the northwestern Atlantic coast and suggested it as a likely candidate for breeding in North America. In 1977, recently-fledged young were reported in Newfoundland, Canada (Finch 1978). Nesting was confirmed in 1982 on the Madeleine Islands, Quebec, Canada (Gosselin and David 1982, David 1983, Aubry 1984).

This paper documents the first breeding record of Common Black-headed Gulls in the United States. The evidence indicates, however, that the Common Black-headed Gull is expanding its range into North America and additional breeding records seem likely.

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[see *American Birds* Volume 40, Number 1, "Apparent hybrid Black-headed Gull nesting in Lake Ontario" by D. V. Weseloh and Pierre Mineau.—ED.]

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Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*).  
 Illustration/James Coe.