

*SUTTON—Pacific Gull.**Gabianus pacificus*, Pacific Gull.

By J. Sutton.

This bird, the largest of the Australian Gulls, which ranges from Shark's Bay, W.A., to Rockhampton, Q., including Tasmania, is found about the South Australian coasts and adjacent islands, its prominent feature being the large lance-shaped bill. The following is J. Gould's description of the adult:—"Head, neck, upper part of the back, all the under surface, upper and under tail coverts, white; back and wings, dark slaty black, the secondaries largely tipped with white, primaries black, the innermost slightly tipped with white; tail, white, the inner web of the outer feather and both webs of the remainder crossed near the tip with a broad band of black; irides, pearl white; eyelid, yellow; bill, orange stained with blood-red at the tip, in the midst of which in some specimens are a few blotches of black; legs, yellow; claws, black."

Professor J. B. Cleland, in Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of South Australia, Vol. XLVII, 1923, pp. 119-126, on The Birds of the Pearson Islands, wrote:—"A full-plumaged female bird, in attempting to steal a bait, got entangled in a fishing line that had been temporarily left unattended. Iris, white; eyelid, orange; base of bill, chrome; distal third of bill, red with dark grey along the cutting edge; inside of bill, chrome; tongue and floor of mouth between rami of lower bill, orange; gape, orange, except for a narrow chrome-coloured outer edge; legs, maize yellow; total length, 58.4 cm.; span across outstretched wings, 134 cm.; T., 40 degrees C. Mites on wings. No entozoa detected. Stomach contents, part of a rock crab."

An immature male (see Plate IV) which was obtained by Mr. H. T. Condon at Port Gawler on 16th February, 1935:—"The general colour of the plumage smoke-brown; the side of the head and neck, plain brown, but the forehead and chin lighter in colour, presenting a slightly mottled appearance; the under surface light brown, becoming dirty white on the abdomen; back, brown; the upper and under tail-coverts, scapulars, and upper wing-coverts, brown, each feather being edged with lighter colour, mostly dirty white; the upper surface of the primaries and tail, very dark brown; bases of feathers white; iris, hazel; bill, brownish black with lighter (deep yellow) tip on both mandibles; feet and legs, brownish-black, soles lighter;



Plate IV.—Pacific Gull (*Larus pacificus*).

SUTTON—Pacific Gull.

inside mouth, white; total length, 66 cm.; span of outstretched wings, 156.5 cm. (5 feet 2 inches); weight, 1,133.88 grammes (2½ lb.).”

The immature bird appears to take a long time to acquire the adult plumage. A. J. Campbell mentions a bird captured in 1884, which did not assume the adult plumage until the seasonal moult in 1888. J. W. Mellor (in Mathews) stated that he had kept a pair in captivity from December, 1907 (that year's birds) till April, 1911, when they were barely in adult plumage. I have seen the species on 25 occasions in the past six years at the Outer Harbor—18 single birds, six pairs, and one flock of five immature birds. On seven of those occasions only were adults seen. At Streaky Bay in August, 1923, four immature birds were seen. They settled on the jetty, on the house roofs and chimneys, and hovered over the streets and yards in search of food. Dr. C. Sullivan (S.A. Ornithologist, Vol. IX, p. 106, 1907), writing from Ceduna stated:—“The Pacific Gulls are fairly common, especially the young mottled-brown phase. These fight for scraps in the backyards with Silver Gulls (*Larus novae-hollandiae*) as their opponents.” On page 165 he gives the native name as Yow. I made the call of the adult birds as Nhow Nhow. One pair seemed to call How How, and sometimes How-How quickly-repeated. In South Australia the species has been recorded from—Nepean Bay, Stokes Bay, and Vivonne Bay (Kangaroo Island); Hindmarsh Island; near Goolwa; Encounter Bay; Outer Harbor; Port Gawler; Port Vincent; Stansbury; Althorpe Islands; Pondalowie Bay; Gleeson's Landing; Wardang Island; Port Broughton; Port Augusta; Wedge Island; Port Lincoln; Kellidie Bay; Elliston; Pearson Island; Venus Bay; Streaky Bay; St. Francis Island; Ceduna; Davenport Creek (a saltwater inlet).

Nesting was reported from Nepean Bay, Stokes Bay, Pearson Island, and A.B.C. Islands in Venus Bay. The clutch is usually three eggs, but sometimes only two are laid. Their food consists of fish, crustacea, other sea-birds' eggs, and refuse thrown from ships.

Some years ago there was a good deal of controversy over the statement that the Pacific Gulls were responsible for the broken “Warrener's” shells (*Turbo stamineus*) found on Wedge and Althorpe Islands and Pondalowie Bay. It was said that this species carried the shells up in the air and dropped them on

the rocks in order to smash them and obtain the shellfish. One of the shells weighed $10\frac{1}{2}$ ounces empty. A specimen in the S.A. Museum weighs 13 ounces, and measures 12 cm. in length, 8 in width, and 7.5 in depth. Mr. B. C. Cotton, the Conchologist at the Museum, says he has never seen it done, but considers that the birds may be able to carry up small shells, but not the heavy ones.

In April, 1932, there were reports of a Pacific Gull being seen in the Torrens River in the City of Adelaide. On investigation by Dr. A. M. Morgan and myself the bird was found to be a Black-backed Gull (*Larus dominicanus*), which belonged to the Adelaide Zoo. It escaped the wing-cutting in 1931, and used to leave the Zoo and fly about the district and return. Later its appearance was reported as a Pacific Gull from the suburban seashores. A flock of Black-backed Gulls, which are very like the Pacific Gulls in general appearance, was imported from South Africa some years ago. This incident illustrates the danger of accepting sight records generally, and especially those in cities that have a Zoological Garden.
