

THE KELP GULL IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

D. H. CLOSE

Edited by S. A. Parker, December, 1979.

The known breeding range of the Kelp (Dominican) Gull *Larus dominicanus* is confined in Australia to New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. It is generally uncommon in these States, except in south-eastern Tasmania where it is quite numerous: for example, about 125 breeding pairs have been found on Green I., D' Entrecasteaux Channel, in January 1977 (Green 1977), while about 530 birds have been counted at Lauderdale in April 1979 (M. Carter, pers. comm.). The species' curiously uneven distribution in Tasmania is illustrated in Thomas (1979). In N.S.W. an estimated 12-15 pairs have bred regularly on offshore islands (Lane 1979), and in Victoria at least one pair has bred annually on Seal Rocks, near Phillip I. since 1970/1 (Loyn 1975, C. Corben, pers. comm. 1979).

The belief (Serventy *et al.* 1971) that the species has recently colonised Australia and is extending its range seems plausible but hard to assess, because of the likelihood that it has been overlooked in the past through confusion with the Pacific Gull *L. pacificus* (see below). But D. G. Thomas reports (pers. comm.) that it seems to be spreading up the east coast of Tasmania. Moreover a long-term increase in numbers has been noted both in Tasmania (Green 1977, Thomas 1979) and in N.S.W. (Lane 1979). This trend may cause an increase in occurrences elsewhere in Australia.

In N.S.W., Victoria and Tasmania the species seems to be largely or mainly resident, for no seasonal fluctuation in status has been reported in print. But some individuals may disperse great distances from their place of

birth: for example, a bird banded as a runner near Newcastle, N.S.W., was recovered nearly four years later near Fremantle, Western Australia (Serventy *et al.* 1971). This sort of dispersal presumably accounts for the infrequent records from South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland. There have been only a few records in either of the last two States. They have occurred in February, April, August and October in W.A. (Serventy & Whittell 1976) and between February and August in Queensland (Storr 1973, Roberts 1979).

There follows a list of all the confirmed records for South Australia that I can find. In all cases I have obtained details from the observer. The species is evidently very uncommon in this State, for these are the only records that I found in searching the local literature (*S. Aust. Orn.*, S.A.O.A. Newsletter, *Bird Talk*) and questioning several observers who, between them, have extensive experience of coasts from the South-East to Ceduna. There is no suggestion yet of seasonal bias in occurrence beyond the fact that there are no records for July or August. Birds of different ages from first-year to adult are represented, the large proportion of adults being perhaps due to their being easier to identify. The occurrence of adults during the spring-summer breeding season (nos. 2, 4, 8) is noteworthy. Records come from several regions: South-East, Kangaroo I., Gulf St Vincent, Spencer Gulf and the West. South Australian birds may have been hatched in N.S.W., as is indicated by the banding recovery noted above. But the relatively large numbers in south-eastern Tasmania make it at least as likely that some S.A. birds originate there.

I have found much confusion to have been caused by the erroneous assertion in the standard literature (e.g. Serventy *et al.* 1971) that the absence of a black tail-band distinguishes the adult Kelp Gull from the adult Pacific Gull. In fact the Pacific Gull may also lack a tail-band when it moults all rectrices simultaneously, while the Kelp may retain a tail-band when all or nearly all other features of sub-adult plumage have disappeared (see B. I. Robertson 1977 for photographs). The following records are known to be based (except nos. 1 and 3, which are assumed with good reason to be based) on other features, chiefly bill-shape.

- (1) Outer Harbor, Port Adelaide. One immature on 2 March 1968, first identified by Tim Kenney, who was familiar with the species in N.S.W. Two immatures on 2 April 1968 were photographed by Mrs M. H. Daley. The original slides have been mislaid, but a copy of one—a black and white print of one bird, in second or third year plumage—is in my possession.
- (2) Grange (metropolitan beach). One adult and one young immature seen by J. B. Cox in November 1968.
- (3) Ceduna. One juvenile or first-year bird in December 1969, identified by G. Corben.
- (4) Outer Harbor. Two adults photographed by D. J. Vincent on 27 October 1970. Identity confirmed by J. B. Cox.
- (5) Glenelg (metropolitan beach). One bird *ca* two years old identified by J. B. Cox on 29 January 1972.
- (6) Kingscote, Kangaroo Island. One adult identified by J. Hatch on 7 March 1975, the field notes being seen by me.
- (7) Little Dip, *ca* 10 km SE of Robe. One adult identified on 11 September 1977 by I. A. May, who described the bird to me.
- (8) Ceduna. One adult photographed on 30 January 1978 by R. James, and the slides seen by me.
- (9) Grange on 8 May 1979, and nearby Henley Beach on 25 June (obviously the same bird). Sub-adult seen by C. Houston who showed field notes to me.
- (10) One km S of Pt Neill, Spencer Gulf. One adult on 14 September 1979 identified by T. Cox, who sent field notes to me.
- (11) Ceduna. One adult on 22 February 1979, identified by R. Drummond, who submitted his description (which I saw) to the R.A.O.U. Atlas Scheme.

REFERENCES

- Green, R. H. 1977. *Birds of Tasmania*. Pub. by author, Launceston.
- Lane, S. G. 1979. Summary of the breeding seabirds on N.S.W. coastal islands, *Corella* 3:9.
- Loyd, R. 1975. Westernport Bay Environmental Study 1973-1974, Project Report. 4.4.8, Min. for Conservation, Victoria.
- Roberts, G. J. 1979. *Birds of South-East Queensland*. Queensland Conservation Council, Brisbane.
- Robertson, B. I. 1977. Identification of Pacific and Dominican Gulls, *Aust. Bird Watcher* 7:5-10.
- Serventy, D. L., Serventy, V., and Warham, J. 1971. *The Handbook of Australian Sea-Birds*, Reed, Sydney.
- Serventy, D. L. & H. M. Whittell. 1976 *Birds of Western Australia*. 5th ed., Lamb, Perth.
- Storr, G. M. 1973. *List of Queensland Birds*, W.A. Museum.
- Thomas, D. G. 1979. *Tasmanian Bird Atlas, Fauna of Tasmania*, Hobart.