

HEERMANN'S GULL: A NEW BIRD FOR OKLAHOMA

By JOHN S. TOMER

On the morning of 25 August 1979, while James C. Hoffman and I were birding along the Cimarron River Arm of Keystone Reservoir in Creek County, northeastern Oklahoma, we came upon a flock of about 200 gulls at rest on a sandbar 250 yards from one end of the State Highway 48 bridge that crosses the Arm. Training our telescopes on the flock, hoping to see an early Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), or possibly a California Gull (*L. californicus*), we decided that all were Ringbills (*L. delawarensis*).

Suddenly the gulls took flight. Rather than moving to another part of the reservoir, however, they circled upward in a tight flock, among them a very dark individual that had not been part of the resting flock. The dark-all-over bird was about the size of the Ringbills; it did not seem to differ much from them in behavior; but when, within five minutes or so, the gulls



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*An immature bird photographed by Hannah Bass along the Arkansas River below the Keystone Reservoir dam on 8 December 1979. The paleness of the basal half of the bill shows well in this picture.*

had risen to perhaps 500 feet above the lake, the dark bird left the flock, flew in our direction, and presently was about 200 feet directly overhead. Now, looking closely, we perceived that its underparts were wholly without light markings on the belly, flanks, and under tail coverts and that the tail was rounded. We decided that it was, in other words, a uniformly dark gull. But to which species did it belong? Next day, when I returned, hoping to see the puzzling bird again, I could not find it.

On the morning of 4 December, Eleanor Sieg, John Dickerson, Hazel Ekholm, Alice Hensy, Hannah Bass, and several other members of the Tulsa Audubon Society (TAS) discovered a similarly dark-all-over gull among the several Ringbills and Bonaparte's Gulls (*L. philadelphia*) that were feeding in the water below the reservoir's dam in Tulsa County about 8½ miles east of the aforementioned bridge. No one felt at all confident in naming the species to which the bird belonged, for it was unlike any gull that had been listed for the Tulsa area.

The moot gull remained in the vicinity of the dam for several weeks. Many observers saw it clearly. Robert J. Farris and Hannah Bass photographed it (see halftone illustrations). On 5 December, Elizabeth Hayes tape-recorded its calls. After consulting all available guides, everyone agreed that the puzzling bird had to be a Heermann's Gull (*L. heermanni*) in the dark plumage of its first year. Our TAS Recorder, Elizabeth Hayes, sent to George M. Sutton, State Recorder for the Oklahoma Ornithological Society, a full report on all that she and the many other observers had seen.

The report convinced Dr. Sutton that the dark gull was of a species not



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*Photographed by Hannah Bass along the Arkansas River below the Keystone Reservoir dam on 8 December 1979. The pale basal half of the bill does not show in this picture, but the darkness of the legs and feet does.*

heretofore recorded in Oklahoma. It did not, however, completely convince him that the bird was *Larus heermanni*. He had, in 1971, visited the Galápagos Islands, where he had seen the endemic Lava Gull (*L. fuliginosus*), a species whose every plumage-stage between the natal down and the adult resembles the first-year Heermann's, so he could not help suspecting that our Tulsa bird might be an immature Lava Gull. His suspicion was, admittedly, strengthened by the fact that he had recently identified an Oklahoma specimen of another bird he had seen much of on the Galápagos, a Giant Frigatebird (*Aquila minor*), whose capture at Perry, Oklahoma, on 3 November, 1975 had given the continental United States its first record for that spectacular species (see Heller, 1977, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 10: 9-10). Sutton's carefully considered advice: Collect the dark gull if possible, lest there continue to be doubts as to what it actually had been.

Early in March 1980, it was obvious that some of our wintering gulls had begun to leave us. On 8 March, with the permission of Cliff N. Hays and J. Arlyn Hendricks, respectively Project Manager and Park Ranger of the U.S. Corps of Engineers, I collected the dark gull. Dr. Sutton prepared the specimen, finding it to be a not very fat female (UOMZ 16130, weight 456 grams). D. Scott Wood borrowed from the U.S. National Museum a



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*Photographed by Robert J. Farris, along the Arkansas River below the Keystone Reservoir dam on 12 December 1979. What appear to be markings on the underwings are actually light-struck parts of feathers.*

first-year specimen of Lava Gull; the remarkable similarity of our bird to the Lava Gull was perceived by all who compared them; and the Oklahoma bird was pronounced *Larus heermanni*. The specimen's wing measured 324 mm., the tail 129, the culmen 39. The bill colors of the freshly shot bird were close to those shown in Dwight's classic work on the gulls of the world (Dwight, 1925, Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist. 52, Plate 13, Fig. 3).

Heermann's Gull breeds along the Pacific coast south of the United States on "islands of the Gulf of California . . . and of the coast of Mexico . . . migrating northward after the breeding season to California and . . . southern British Columbia" (Dwight, *op. cit.*, p. 147). It winters along the coast "from Oregon to Guatemala (San José, Chiapam)" (AOU Check-list, 1957, p. 229). For almost a century after its discovery (in 1832 by Cassin), it was unreported from the continental interior, but on 20 March 1919 an adult male "in breeding plumage" was found dead on Pinos Altos Mountain near Silver City, southwestern New Mexico (Bailey, Birds of New Mexico, New Mexico Dep. Game & Fish, Albuquerque, p. 293); on 13 November 1955, one was seen along the Colorado River "about 30 miles above Yuma," in southwestern Arizona (Phillips, Marshall, & Monson, 1964, The birds of Arizona, Univ. Arizona Press, Tucson, p. 39); on 7 and 27 November 1970, the species was seen near Tucson, southern Arizona (Huber, 1971, Auk 88: 929); and within recent years there have been many scattered sightings from inland areas far from the Pacific coast. Into Arizona, where the species has been sighted "more than a dozen" times, "a few now wander . . . each year" (Witzeman, Hubbard, & Kaufman, 1977, Amer. Birds 31: 359; 1978, Amer. Birds 32: 241). In Nevada there have been at least three sightings (Kingery, 1977, Amer. Birds 31: 205), in Texas one sighting (Williams, 1976, Amer. Birds 30: 736); in Michigan one sighting (Maley, 1980, Amer. Birds 34: 343), in Ohio one sighting (Kleen, 1980, Amer. Birds 34: 278).

Are all of these extralimital records merely a result of increased attention and better reporting, or has Heermann's Gull — for reasons beyond our understanding — been obliged recently to seek food and shelter away from the Pacific Ocean?

5911 EAST 46TH ST., TULSA, OKLAHOMA 74135, 14 FEBRUARY 1981.

## AN IMPORTANT MARSHY POND IN KINGFISHER COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

By JOHN S. SHACKFORD

About 4 miles southeast of Dover, Kingfisher County, central Oklahoma, and not far from the Cimarron River, is an extensive low-lying area that has held enough water during the past two or three summers to permit the growth of a good stand of bulrushes and cattails. On 25 May 1980, I waded around this marshy area, finding two nests of the Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*), one with 10 eggs, the other with 1, and four nests of the American Coot (*Fulica americana*) containing 2, 6, 9 and 9 eggs. A colony of Great-tailed Grackles (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) had established itself