

SHORT NOTES

Sight-record of the Dominican Gull in south-eastern Queensland

At 16:30 on 13 February 1971 a congregation of gulls, terns and cormorants was noted on a sand bank in the Nerang River at Southport, Q. A large black-mantled gull was observed in the group and with my wife I landed from a boat near the birds.

At approximately 30 m the gull was examined with 8×30 and 7×35 binoculars in good light and the following features noted: Size about 50 per cent larger than adjacent Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae* and approximately the same length as a nearby Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne tschegrava*; wings black; bill yellow and of medium size with no red visible; legs yellow. From the size and shape of the bill I suspected that the bird was a Dominican Gull *Larus dominicanus* and unlikely to be a Pacific Gull *L. pacificus*.

The resting bird was photographed from 25 m with a 35 mm camera fitted with a 400 mm lens, then flushed and photographed in flight. In flight the plain white tail with no black sub-terminal band was clearly seen, as were the white spots on the outer primaries. Examination of enlarged photographs verified these field-marks and confirmed that the bird was a Dominican Gull.

L. dominicanus was recently reported from Cairns, Q. (Gill 1970, Sunbird), but I cannot find any other reference to the occurrence of the species in Queensland.

I. FIEN, 61 Highland Street, Wavell Heights, Q. 4012.
22 February 1971.

[Mr Fien submitted his photographs with his record; as he says, they clearly show the characteristics of *L. dominicanus*. Ed.]

Dominican Gull in northern Queensland

An immature Dominican Gull *Larus dominicanus* was seen on the foreshore at Cairns at the end of June 1969. It was with a party of Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae* and was the only bird of its species present. The original discovery was made by Mrs M. L. Cassels of Cairns in February 1969 (1970, N. Qd Nat. 37:5-6). Assistance in identification was given by Messrs. K. Hindwood, L. Robinson and E. McNamara. It was also seen by Mrs Gill of Innisfail (1970, Sunbird). It has since moulted into adult plumage, which makes identification positive.

I saw it at least once daily during the last week in June 1969, the nearest distance being at about 30

metres, with 8×50 binoculars. The weather was showery, with occasional heavy rains, quite unseasonable for the time of year.

The following description is taken from a drawing of the bird made in the field: Bill yellow, with dark tip and red spot on lower mandible; crown white, flecked with brown; chest and underparts white, flecked with brown; back brown; rump white; tail white with dark tips, no sign of sub-terminal band; wings black, with apparent white edges; feet greyish yellow. It was fairly easy to approach, and was at least twice the size of Silver Gulls with which it constantly associated.

Previous references to the Pacific Gull (*Larus pacificus*) in Queensland could perhaps refer to this species.

N. JACK, 54 Cochrane Street, Paddington, Q. 4064.

24 February 1971.

Damage to birds by hailstones

On 9 November 1970 at 12:15 heavy rain and strong wind were recorded at 'Cowel North', Lake Cowal, NSW. At 12:45 Straw-necked Ibis *Threskiornis spinicollis* were observed to land in paddocks surrounding the homestead.

At 13:15 a shower of hail with stones up to 25 mm swept over the area. This was followed by a second hail-shower that lasted between five and seven minutes and three hailstones picked up outside the homestead measured $76 \times 52 \times 44$, $73 \times 51 \times 32$ and $51 \times 44 \times 32$ mm. Most of the hailstones appeared to be about 65 mm long.

The hail dented the galvanized-iron roofs of the farm buildings and put dents in the roofs of vehicles; some trees were completely stripped of their leaves. After the shower 8, 11, 13 and 24 hailstones were counted in four separate quadrats in the garden of the homestead.

During the storm ibis remained feeding in the paddocks and at 14:00 the paddocks in which the ibis had been feeding were checked. In a paddock about 400 m north-north-east of the farm the following damaged birds were picked up:

White-faced Heron *Ardea novaehollandiae*
adult, left wing broken.

Straw-necked Ibis *Threskiornis spinicollis*
adult, fractured skull
adult, neck broken
adult, both wings broken
adult, left wing broken
adult, right wing broken

immature, right wing broken
immature, right wing broken.

Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus*
adult, right wing broken.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
adult, right wing broken.

Black-backed Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen*
adult, broken back and fractured skull.

In ten quadrats each of one square metre in the paddocks where the birds were picked up the numbers of hailstones were 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20 and 24.

Several other places known as favoured feeding or roosting areas were checked, but no damaged birds were found. This was probably because the distribution of the rain and hail was very erratic. At 'Cowal North' 6 mm of rain fell but at the same time eleven km south-south-east 42 mm were recorded. The larger size of hail was not recorded at other places than 'Cowral North'; there, such large stones had never before been recorded.

W. J. M. VESTJENS, *Division of Wildlife Research, CSIRO, PO Box 84, Lyneham, ACT 2602.*

22 February 1971.

Sight-record of Uniform Swiftlet at Atherton, Q.

On 20 January 1971 from 10:00 to 11:00 over 500 Spine-tailed Swifts *Hirundapus caudacutus* were observed feeding over an area of about 1 km², about 4 km north-east of Atherton. At the time myriads of small insects were flying round the tops of trees and garden shrubs adjoining an open pasture. The flock was observed through 8 × 40 binoculars and checked for Fork-tailed Swifts *Apus pacificus*,

eleven of which were seen. Four swiftlets *Collocalia* spp. were also seen in the scattered flock and closely checked; they were not Grey Swiftlets *Collocalia spodiopygia*, which I know well and which occur in flocks over local pastures most of the year. As the birds circled and fed from 25 to 150 m high I noted that the swiftlets were uniformly coloured with no white or grey on the rump or underparts and similar in size to Grey Swiftlets. The weather was hot and sultry, with storm showers and thunder later in the afternoon.

Next day from 12:00 to 14:00 about 50 Spine-tailed Swifts were again observed flying and feeding over a field that was being mown, about 5 km north-east of Atherton. I and my son again checked the flock through binoculars; two Fork-tailed Swifts were identified and again four swiftlets as on the previous day. We studied one of the swiftlets closely as it circled and fed 20 to 60 m high. Again we noted that it was uniformly coloured like the birds seen the previous day, the colour being dark above and a little lighter below with no white or grey on the rump or underparts; the tail was slightly forked, but not conspicuously so. The weather was again hot and sultry, with a light northerly wind and some dust haze on the ranges, the temperature at 17:00 being 35 °C. Reference to Slater (1970, *A Field Guide to Australian Birds*) left no doubt that the birds were Uniform Swiftlets *Collocalia vanikorensis*. Uniform Swiftlets have not apparently been reported before from south of Cooktown, and I have certainly never heard of any records from the Atherton tableland. They may perhaps rarely visit northern Queensland in the summer and could easily be overlooked.

JAMES A. BRAVERY, *Box 178, Atherton, Q. 4883.*
20 March 1971.