

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

this nutrient rich abundance of food would greatly enhance the survival rate of young. The easy availability of invertebrate food might well make for a successful second nesting before fall migration. **Robert R. Sargent and Martha B. Sargent**, 7570 Mack Hicks Road, Trussville, AL 35173.

FIRST ALABAMA RECORD OF CALIFORNIA GULL (*LARUS CALIFORNICUS*)

Robert A. Duncan

The California Gull breeds from southern Mackenzie Mountains, Canada, east to the Dakotas, south to northern Utah and west to northeastern California. Wintering birds occur from southern Washington and eastern Idaho south, primarily along the Pacific coast to southern Baja California and Colima, Mexico. There are records of vagrants throughout the eastern United States including the Texas Gulf Coast (American Ornithologists' Union 1983. Checklist of North American Birds. 6th ed. Washington, D.C., Am. Ornithol. Union). There are about 10 reports for Florida where it is still considered unverified due to lack of a specimen or acceptable photographs (Robertson, W.B. and Woolfenden, G.E., Florida Bird Species. 1992. An Annotated List. Fl. Ornithol. Soc. Special Pub. #6. Gainesville).

On 15 April 1996, at about 10:30 a.m., while scanning numerous gulls and terns loafing on the outer beach at Mobile Point, Fort Morgan, Baldwin Co., Al., I noted an adult gull loafing among adult Herring Gulls (*Laurus argentatus*) which was noticeably different from them. Its wings were obviously darker

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than the wings of the adjacent Herring Gulls yet not dark enough to be a Lesser Black-backed (Larus fuscus) or Great Black-backed (Larus marinus) Gulls. This feather and its apparent smaller size, a few inches smaller than the Herring Gulls, set it apart from the others. Its legs were light yellow-green, quite different from the pink legged Herring Gulls. Its bill was yellow with a red gonys and dark mark adjacent to it near the tip of the bill. There were white sub-apical spots at the end of the dark primaries. Otherwise the bird was white, including the tail, except for small dark spots limited to the center of the outer tail feathers. It had a dark eye, which was in obvious contrast to the light-eyed Herring Gulls around it.

I watched the bird for about 10 minutes and was not sure of its identity but suspected it as a California Gull. After returning to my car and reading the National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America (1987, 2nd Ed.), I immediately concluded it was a California Gull since the dark eye automatically eliminated all other adult gull possibilities that might be found in this area. The trace of dark on the tail indicated either a fourth year bird going into final adult plumage or a full adult coming out of winter plumage.

The bird disappeared while I was scanning other gulls loafing on the beach. I then went to the bird banding station at Fort Morgan where I informed the birders there of this vagrant. At about 1:30 p.m., I returned to Mobile Point with Chris Dorgan where we observed it for about 5 minutes. Mr. Dorgan agreed with my original identification and noted all field marks. We returned to

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Mobile Point at about 2:30 p.m. with other birders but the gull could not be found.

This record, pending acceptance by the Alabama Bird Records Committee, would constitute the first published report, though hypothetical, of the species occurrence in Alabama. The record is considered hypothetical since there were less than three experienced observers who saw the bird. **Robert A. Duncan**, 614 Fairpoint Dr., Gulf Breeze, Fl. 32561.



Yellow-billed cuckoo, (Coccyzus americanus), 1995,
East Jefferson County, AL. Photo by Paul Franklin.