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ELEVEN PELAGIC TRIPS INTO THE EASTERN GULF OF MEXICO

CHARLES B. BUHRMAN AND LARRY A. HOPKINS

A quarter of a century has passed since Lowery and Newman (1954, U. S. Fish Wild. Serv., Fish. Bull. 89: 521) concluded that "... so little is known about the real distribution of sea birds over the Gulf that in many cases their very presence is merely inferred from their occurrence in coastal situations after storms." This condition remains much the same today as when those words were written. Woolfenden and Schreiber (1973, pp. IIIJ-1-22 in A summary of knowledge of the eastern Gulf of Mexico 1973, St. Petersburg, State Univ. System of Fla., Inst. of Oceanography) constantly underscored the lack of knowledge about the pelagic birds from these waters. This background supplied the initiative and encouraged the authors to undertake a series of trips into the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

A canvass was made of the local fishing boats which make regular trips and one seemed especially suitable because it typically travels 90 nautical miles due west of Clearwater, Pinellas County, Florida. This boat, the "Double Eagle II," leaves Clearwater Marina at 0600 and returns at 1700, allowing three hours of fishing at its destination 90 nautical miles out in the Gulf.

RESULTS

The account below includes all sightings of all species observed except for non-migratory and non-pelagic birds seen within 10 miles from shore. In the winter months, the first hour is traveled in darkness.

For each species we include the total seen for all trips, the dates of sighting, the number seen and the distance(s) from shore in nautical miles. Mileage was estimated by comparing the time of sighting with the average speed of the boat (22 knots). On three dates we entered the waters off Pasco County beyond sixty nautical miles. They are indicated here (only) with a dagger(†).

In 1976 trips were made on 15 August, 25 September and 7 November†; in 1977, on 5 February, 8 May, 31 July†, 27 August, 17 September and 10 October; in 1978, on 19 February and 9 April†.

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*). — 194. 19 Feb 78, 1/55, 1/44, 1/18; 9 Apr 78, 191/8-87-10.

CORY'S SHEARWATER (*Puffinus diomedea*). — 9. 25 Sept 76, 1/35; 31 July 77, 1/8, 1/25, 1/28, 1/37; 27 Aug 77, 1/27, 1/60, 1/15; 17 Sept 77, 1/35.

GREATER SHEARWATER (*Puffinus gravis*). — 11. 25 Sept 76, 5/35; 17 Sept 77, 2/19; 10 Oct 77, 1/36, 3/49.

AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER (*Puffinus lherminieri*). — 2. 9 Apr 78, 1/9, 1/83.

SHEARWATER sp. (*Puffinus* sp.). — 2. 15 Aug 76, 1/80; 31 July 77, 1/25.

LEACH'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*). — 1. 15 Aug 76, 1/80 (see *Fla. Field Nat.* 6: 44.

- WILSON'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanites oceanicus*). — 6. 8 May 77, 3/87; 31 July 77, 3/70.
- STORM-PETREL sp. (HYDROBATIDAE sp.). — 2. 31 July 77, 2/75.
- BLUE-FACED BOOBY (*Sula dactylatra*). — 2. 27 Aug 77, 1/80; 17 Sept 77, 1/43.
- GANNET (*Morus bassanus*). — 58. 5 Feb 77, 1/20; 19 Feb 78, 1/30, 1/42, 1/89, 6/89-90, 2/77, 1/56, 1/47, 1/27, 1/4; 9 Apr 78, 42/7-85-12.
- DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*). — 4. 19 Feb 78, 1/23, 1/46, 2/51.
- MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata magnificens*). — 4. 7 Nov 76, 1/25; 10 Oct 77, 1/81, 2/40.
- CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*). — 48. 8 May 77, 12/50-90; 9 Apr 78, 11/85, 12/87, 13/79.
- LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Florida caerulea*). — 1. 9 Apr 78, 1/79.
- LOUISIANA HERON (*Hydranassa tricolor*). — 2. 9 Apr 78, 2/79.
- BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*). — 18. 8 May 77, 5/60; 17 Sept 77, 6/43; 10 Oct 77, 5/44, 1/73; 9 Apr 78, 1/43.
- DUCK sp. (*Anas* sp.). — 21. 25 Sept 76, 20/70; 10 Oct 77, 1/37.
- RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*). — 21. 9 Apr 78, 4/6, 7/41, 10/63.
- AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*). — 2. 9 Apr 78, 1/85, 1/81.
- SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*). — 1. 8 May 77, 1/90.
- RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*). — 2. 17 Sept 77, 2/83.
- PHALAROPE sp. (*Lobipes* or *Phalaropus* sp.). — 9. 25 Sept 76, 8/25; 17 Sept 77, 1/10.
- SANDPIPER sp. (*Scolopacidae* sp.). — 1. 27 Aug 77, 1/50.
- POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*). — 2. 25 Sept 76, 1/35; 31 July 77, 1/18.
- PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). — 1. 9 Apr 78, 1/83.
- JAEGER sp. (*Stercorarius* sp.). — 6. 2 May 77, 1/15; 5 Aug 77, 1/10, 1/60; 9 Apr 78, 2/26, 1/83.
- HERRING GULL (*Larus argentatus*). — 90. 19 Feb 78, 65/10-90-10; 9 Apr 78, 25/22-87-10.
- LAUGHING GULL (*Larus atricilla*). — 61. 7 Nov 76, 12/80; 10 Oct 77, 1/80; 19 Feb 78, 1/50, 1/85; 9 Apr 78, 46/55-85-49.
- BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Larus philadelphia*). — 6. 19 Feb 78, 1/40, 2/35, 3/36.
- FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*). — 1. 19 Feb 78, 1/29.
- COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*). — 1000 +. 25 Sept 76, 1000 +/25; 7 Nov 76, 60/80; 19 Feb 78, 1/85.
- BRIDLED TERN (*Sterna anaethetus*). — 13. 25 Sept 76, 1/60, 2/10; 8 May 77, 3/65; 31 July 77, 1/75; 10 Oct 77, 4/49, 2/78.
- LEAST TERN (*Sterna albifrons*). — 6. 31 July 77, 4/65; 9 Apr 78, 2/32.
- BRIDLED OR SOOTY TERN (*Sterna anaethetus* or *S. fuscata*). — 3. 15 Aug 76, 1/40; 17 Sept 77, 2/47.
- ROYAL TERN (*Sterna maximus*). — 4. 19 Feb 78, 2/80-90; 9 Apr 78, 2/83.
- TERN sp. (*Sterna* sp.). — 7. 19 Feb 78, 5/37, 2/21.
- BLACK TERN (*Chlidonias niger*). — 1000 +. 25 Sept 76, 1000+/25; 8 May 77, 3/87; 31 July 77, 1/48; 27 Aug 77, 4/80; 17 Sept 77, 4/50; 10 Oct 77, 14/45, 3/43, 30/42, 12/41, 1/20.
- RED-HEADED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*). — 1. 10 Oct 77, 1/50.
- BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*). — 36. 25 Sept 76, 4/80; 8 May 77, 26/35-90; 31 July 77, 2/80; 27 Aug 77, 4/50-80.
- SWALLOW sp. (*Hirundinidae* sp.). — 1. 19 Feb 78, 1/38.

- PURPLE MARTIN (*Progne subis*). — 4. 27 Aug 77, 1/30; 19 Feb 78, 1/36, 2/22.
STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*). — 1. 19 Feb 78, 1/29.
YELLOW WARBLER (*Dendroica petechia*). — 3. 15 Aug 76, 3/35.
CAPE MAY WARBLER (*Dendroica tigrina*). — 2. 8 May 77, 1/20, 1/9.
YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (*Dendroica coronata*). — 2. 5 Feb 77, 2/40.
WARBLER sp. (*Parulidae* sp.). — 15. 15 Aug 76, 15/10-80.

SUMMARY

Both authors made all trips with one exception. Ten others participated so that no fewer than four observers made each trip. In all, 36 species were well-seen, 10 of which were pelagic. One is so irregular (Leach's Storm-Petrel) that it is the subject of a separate paper.

Realizing that these data are insufficient to promote conclusions, the authors were surprised by the numerous sightings of Cory's and Greater shearwaters and Bridled Terns in view of the few previous accounts of these species. Also surprising were the number of species seen and that so many sightings were made well out at sea.

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