LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC) Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or a similar format when submitting records for review to assure that all pertinent information is accounted for. Attach additional pages or files as necessary. Please print or type for hard copy. For electronic copy, be sure to save this file to your computer before entering text. Attach field notes, drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos for more obscurely marked species. When completed (if hard copy), mail to Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216, or e-mail electronic copy as an attachment to Paul Edward Conover at <zoiseaux@lusfiber.net> .

1. English and Scientific names: Kelp Gull (*Larus dominicanus*)

2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage): one pair, plus another adult, and a third-year individual.

3. Parish: St. Bernard
Specific Locality: Delta-Breton NWR, Chandeleur Islands, Curlew Island

4. Date(s) when observed: 23 July 1994

5. Time(s) of day when observed: see below #12: blue-shaded text from eBird account.

6. Reporting observer and city/state address

Reporting observer: Donna L. Dittmann and Steven W. Cardiff
City: 435 Pecan Drive
State: Louisiana

7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): Larry O'Mealie.

8. Other observers who *independently identified* the bird(s): Charlie Lyon, Paul Dickson, and Hubert Hervey were also visiting the island.

9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): weather? Weather on arrival was partly cloudy, 75-80 F, SW/W winds, and thunderstorms in the distance to the NE. Around 8:30 AM a dry squall line rolled through from the NW and there was a wind shift to out of the NW; around 9:00-(;30 we got completely drenched by a rain storm that came in from the west; then it gradually cleared into the PM with thunderstorms in the distance to the SE.

10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): 10 X 40 Leica binoculars

11. Distance to bird(s): Fairly close – we were looking for nest the nest.

12. Duration of observation: With Donna L. Dittmann and Larry O'Meallie surveying Curlew Island in the southern Chandeleur Islands, 6:30 AM-5:00 PM. We accessed the island via seaplane out of Chef Menteur, thanks to the generosity of Dr. O'Meallie. We landed just offshore on the west (sound) side of the island and then drove the plane up onto the sand where there was a tidal cut; the plane remained on the island for the duration. The island was about 7 miles long with about 2 miles south of the cut and about 5 miles north of the cut. From 7:00 AM-12:15 PM we circumnavigated (on foot) the southern section of the island. We covered the southern tip of the north section of the island from 6:30-7:00 AM, and then from 12:15-5:00 PM we walked the entire east (gulf side) shoreline all the way to the north end and back. There was extensive low salt marsh vegetation along the west side of the island with Spartina and patches of low mangroves. Along the crown of the island there was patchy brush/grass plus a few patches of phragmites here and there. Most of the Laughing Gulls were nesting along the east side, most of the terns, large gulls, etc. were nesting along the gulf side of the island where there were more extensive open sand flats between the water and the vegetation line.

13. Habitat: barrier islands

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): Kelp pair was clearly upset by our presence.

15. Description (include only what was actually seen, *not what "should" have been seen;* include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species; body bulk, shape, proportions; bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species, *or for species that are known to hybridize frequently, stress features that help eliminate possible hybrids*): Herring Gull-sized gulls but general structure more pot-bellied and head looked fairly large in relationship to the rest of the body. In flight looked thick-necked and heavy-legged with large feet, as breeding individuals would hang their legs down as they few around the observers. Sexual dimorphism present of pair: male larger than female when individuals compared side by side. All had mantle blackish-gray, notably darker than nearby Laughing Gulls. The mantle had an almost black appearance and in certain light, the birds appeared black and white. The head, underparts, and tail were immaculate white. In flight the primaries from above contrasted little with the dark gray wing. Adults had one mirror on primary #10 and a broad white trailing edge to the secondaries; third year bird had no mirror. The undersurface of the wings in flight were reminiscent of a Laughing Gull with black primaries that graded into dark gray on the inner primaries and continued down the secondaries, forming a distinct dark secondary bar. The bill was on the hefty side with a pronounced gonydeal angle, deep yellow with a large red gonydeal patch. On Curlew Island bird, the iris was white or pale yellow and the orbital ring was red. The legs and feet were greenish-yellow.

16. Voice: Long calls and distraction calls.

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation): No other large black-backed gull has the combination of greenish-yellow legs, a red orbital ring, and adults with a single mirror on primary #10. No hybrid combination shows these characters.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): SWC and Charlie Lyons.

19. Previous experience with this species: Both observers saw this species in Peru.

20. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification): None.

a. at time of observation: None.
b. after observation: None

21. This description is written from:

	notes made during the observation. Are notes attached?	Yes
X	notes made after the observation. At what date?	
X	memory	
	study of images	

22. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain: Yes.

23. Date: 21 February 2020 <compilation of Kelp records for LBRC>
Time:

24. May the LBRC have permission to display in whole or in part this report and accompanying photos on the LOS-LBRC website and LBRC Facebook page?
_yes_____
If yes, may we include your name with the report? __yes____

Donna L. Dittmann and **Steven W. Cardiff**

Kelp Gull (*Larus domincanus*)

Donna L. Dittmann & Steven W. Cardiff

LBRC 95-119

Four adults, including one pair on 23 July 1994; *St. Bernard Par.*, Chandeleur Islands, Curlew Island; DLD/SWC (photographs) and Lawrence O'Meallie.

One adult on 23-24 July 1994; *St. Bernard Par.*, Chandeleur Islands, Curlew Island; Charles E. Lyon (photographs); seen with DLD/SWC/LO on 23 July.

Larry O'Meallie and Dan Purrington discovered a pair of "black-backed gulls" in July 1989 (at that time believed the gulls to be Lesser Black-backed and submitted the record as such to the LBRC). It was not until the following year that the birds were suspected to be Kelp (during LBRC review). Larry had seen the gulls again in 1990 and also realized that the birds were probably not Lesser Black-backeds. Speculation of the identity of the Curlew Island birds continued. The next report of the Curlew Island birds was by Charlotte Seidenberg in 1994. Charlotte sent us photos from her trip. On 23 July 1994, hosted by Larry O'Meallie, we flew to Curlew Island to look for the "Kelp Gulls." Shortly after our arrival we discovered the "original pair." The birds were very aggressive and probably had small chicks by their behavior. The birds were in the same area as Larry had seen them in previous years. Two other "pure" Kelps were observed on the trip.

Description of adults:

Large Herring Gull-sized gull. Mantle blackish-gray, notably darker than nearby Laughing Gulls. The mantle had an almost black appearance and in certain light, the birds appeared black and white. The head, underparts, and tail were immaculate white. The bill was on the hefty side with a pronounced gonydeal angle, deep yellow with a large red gonydeal patch. The iris was white or pale yellow and the orbital ring was red. In flight the primaries from above contrasted little with the dark gray wing. There was one mirror on primary #10 and a broad white trailing edge to the secondaries. The undersurface of the wings in flight were reminiscent of a Laughing Gull with black primaries that graded into dark gray on the inner primaries and continued down the secondaries, forming a distinct dark secondary bar. The head looked fairly large in relationship to the rest of the body in flight, as did the legs and feet. The legs and feet were greenish-yellow.

Elimination of other species:

No other large black-backed gull has the combination of greenish-yellow legs, a red orbital ring, and a single mirror on primary #10. No hybrid combination should show these characters.

Discussion.

Distribution.

Kelp Gull has a circumpolar distribution in the southern hemisphere, occurring in temperate parts of South America, southern Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, various oceanic islands and around the edge of Antarctica (Watson 1975) Two subspecies are described. *L. d. dominicanus*: has a circumpolar southern hemisphere distribution, occurring in South America from southern Brazil (23°S) and Peru (6°) south to Antarctic Peninsula (about 65° S) and Australasian region (Harrison 1983). *L. d. vetula* has a more limited distribution along the coasts of Southern Africa (Brooke and Cooper 1979). The main difference between the two subspecies is iris color: yellow/white in *dominicanus* and brown in *vetula*.

Occurrence in the Gulf of Mexico.

Kelp Gull was first photographed in Mexico at San Fernando in the Rio Lagartos Wildlife Refuge, Yucatan, Mexico on 30 May 1991 (Howell, et al. 1993). Photographs of a pair (most likely the same two birds) were taken: during late May 1993, 11 km east of Las Coloradas (islands in salt ponds, observed copulating before flew off to E); and 11 Feb. 1994, Las Coloradas (pair calling antiphonally in response to approach). One to two adult Kelps have been reported regularly since 1991 Oct-May in Rio Lagartos, mostly around Las Coloradas. Jorge Correa S. (pers com) suggests birds were present as early as 1987; Howell and Webb (1995) state that "up to 2 adults were seen and photographed in four winters since Nov. 1987". As of 20 Dec. 1997, 2 adult Kelps were observed consorting with a small flock of Herrings at Coloradas, near Rio Lagartos, also reportedly seen earlier in Dec. (Richard Wilson, pers com.) All records are between September and May. Howell and Webb (1995) suggest the lack of records between June and September may simply reflect lack of observer coverage.

The first Louisiana record was reported 8 July 1989. Two adults were observed and photographed during aerial courtship displays *St. Bernard Par.*, Chandeleur Islands, Curlew Island by Lawrence P. O'Meallie (photos) & Robert D. Purrington. The record (LBRC 90-3) was submitted as Lesser Black-backed Gull and was rejected during the first

circulation. During the record's circulation, LBRC Members became aware that the birds may be Kelp Gulls. The record has been re-circulated as Kelp Gull, (LBRC 95-00) and is currently still in circulation. On 22-24 June 1990, 2 adults were reported from Curlew Island by Lawrence O'Meallie. O'Meallie believed that the birds represented the same pair observed the previous year. The record was published in Purrington (1990) as possible Kelps but no documentation was submitted to the LBRC. On 31 July 1990, one adult male black-backed gull was reported by Richard Martin (photographs) on Grand Gosier Island, Chandeleur Islands. The Kelp/Yellow-footed gull was paired with a female Herring Gull and they accompanied a full-grown junvenal (LBRC 90-45). This record was submitted as Yellow-footed/Kelp Gull and was rejected. It has been re-circulated (LBRC 90-45) as Kelp and is still in circulation.
On 26 June 1994, one adult was photographed on Curlew Island by Charlotte Seidenberg (photographs- include photo of possible adult hybrid in background of one photo) (LBRC 94-37). Subsequent reports from Curlew between 1996 and 1999 indicate that the original pair is no longer together or still present. Anecdotal information and one late summer survey in 1999 indicate that Kelp Gulls are only present on the Chandeleur Islands only during the summer months. It is possible that the birds move south to Yucatan and the absence during the summer in Yucatan is not one of observer bias, but a true absence. The only specimen was collected 9 June 1998, *St Bernard*: Chandeleur Islands: South Gosier Island, a probably 4th year male. There is only one convincing non-Chandeleur record (thus far), two birds observed on a LOS Pelagic Trip off Belle Pass/Port Fourchon on 17 April 1999. Other records of possible Kelps are not straightforward.

There are probably two acceptable Texas records. On 15 January 1995 through 5 April 1996 one in 3rd yr. plumage was photographed at *Galveston Co.*, Galveston, East Beach (Peter Gottschling, Lynne Aldrich, Tony & Phyllis Frank, Steve Matherly, Macklin Smith, Mike Austin, Paul Sykes, Bill Blakeslee, Guy McCaskie, Therese Clawson, Chuck Sexton, Greg Lasley, John Buckman, P. D. Hulce, Dwight Peake, Hazel Bluhm, Andrew Farnsworth, Elaine & Jack Morman, Randy Pinkston, Brad McKinney, Steve Emmons, and Frank Bumgardner). The Texas Bird Records Committee accepted this record (TBRC 1996-17) on the first circulation. Although probably a Kelp, there are no definitive characters in 3rd yr. plumage. <On 7 February 1997, an adult was photographed at the same locality and assumed to be the same bird returning for another winter and was accepted as such by the TBRC). This bird may in fact be a backcross hybrid.> The Galveston record(s) are currently under review by the ABA-CLC. The other acceptable record is from 4 May 1996, *Kleberg Co.*, N. Padre Island, photographed by Willie Sekula (photos) and accepted by the TBRC as the second state record.

Range Expansions.

There are known range expansions that may suggest Kelp Gull is capable of long-distance vagrancy and subsequent colonization. In Ecuador, Kelp Gulls were observed regularly by May 1993 (previously recorded as occasional winter visitor by DeSchauensee 1982). During January 1994, 40 adult birds and 17 nests, with eggs & small chicks were present at Salinas (2°15'S, 80° 58'W) on Ecuasal salt lakes (Haase, Continga 5). Nesting was again reported in Oct. and indicated an opportunistic use of breeding habitat/resources. The article suggests <DLD interpretation> that the species probably bred as early as 1983. This is a *minor* northward expansion from the species known range in Peru.

The species colonized Australia in 1943 (Blackers et al. 1984) and small breeding colonies have existed in eastern Australia since 1958 (first breeding record) from New South Wales, Moon Island, and Five Islands (Slater 1970).

In Africa, the species first nested in the Northern Hemisphere in Senegambia in 1980 and 1983 (Urban et al. 1986). This would be a similar jump, distance-wise, to the Gulf of Mexico; the literature does not indicate which subspecies is involved. There is no other example of a species comparable to Kelp to provide an explanation for its current expansion to the Gulf of Mexico.

Origin of Gulf of Mexico birds

It is difficult to determine from which geographic population the Gulf of Mexico birds are derived based on current information. Iris color indicates the nominate subspecies. SOFT PART COLORS of the nominate subspecies vary among individuals and during the year: yellowish-gray iris, orbital ring deep orange, foot color varies: yellow to olive green or bluish-gray (Antarctic distribution from waters, islands, and lands south of 55° S latitude from Watson 1975); "adults with grayish-green legs", iris pale hazel, orbital ring orange, feet mustard yellow or olive-green (according to age or season New Zealand breeding population from Falla et al. (1966<in *Euphonia*, L. B. Spear, photos); iris white, orbital ring red, legs & feet yellow to orange-yellow (Australia breeding population from Slater (1970); iris straw yellow, orbital ring red, feet & legs greenish-yellow (Madagascar breeding population from Langrand (1990); grayish-green legs Southern Chile (in *Euphonia*, Howell observation of adults during Nov-Dec. 92, 93); grayish-olive with no shade of yellow (Chile, L. Bevier photos); legs varying from greenish to fairly bright yellow, Nov. 93 (Central & Northern Chile <in *Euphonia*, Howell photographs).

Future DNA analysis may shed more light on the actual source population of Gulf of Mexico Kelp Gulls.

Pattern of vagrancy.

The only appropriate records with regard to status in Louisiana are those in the Gulf of Mexico. There are no intervening records or reports of expansion northward from Brazil to Venezuela or Colombia. There is nothing to suggest that Pacific Coast birds moved north and across Panama and into the Gulf of Mexico. Vagrant records of species such as Band-tailed (records from Florida), Gray (identification of Louisiana record not confirmed), or Gray-headed (recent Florida record may be from African subspecies) gulls may be inappropriate based on identification or actual origin.

Suspected breeding occurred in Louisiana in 1989. Assuming a minimum of two offspring per year from the Curlew Kelp pair (present from 1989 through at least 1994) would be twelve offspring. Offspring would attain breeding condition by 1993-94 (assuming 3-4 year maturation). Curlew birds may have been present as early as 1987 (=Yucatan appearance). All Gulf of Mexico Kelps may be derived from the original pair. If this were the case, there would be no "pattern of vagrancy" to the Gulf of Mexico.

Status in captivity and man-assisted origin.

The presence of Kelp Gulls in the Gulf of Mexico may be derived from a captive origin. Kelp Gulls are kept in captivity. The following ISIS-listed zoos currently have Kelp Gulls: Louisville Zoo (one male captive bred Kelp hybrid-original Kelp and other parent dead); John Balls Zoological Garden, Grand Rapids, MI (4 Kelp, 3 females, 1 male with clipped wings; this bird was originally from Sea World import and received 10/25/94 from eggs collected Nelson Is., South Shetlands, Antarctica and hatched 12/83). Sea Worlds (not ISIS-listed) also have Kelp Gulls. After two years of correspondence and an official request, the following information has been obtained: Sea Worlds have 11 Kelp Gulls currently in captivity -- Sea World-San Antonio (four birds remaining of original six; 2 died); Sea World-Ohio (birds present in 1998, number not specified), and Sea World-Orlando (birds present in 1998, number not specified). The actual number of eggs imported and hatched was not obtained. A Sea World "imported bird" would show adult alternate plumage by 1986-87. The timing is coincidental to the very first reports from the Yucatan. Sea World, nor other zoos contacted, report no escapes.

Kelp Gull expansion may be the result of ship-assisted (restrained or passive) transport. This scenario cannot be discounted.

Conclusion.

We cannot discount a natural origin based on our current knowledge of the species' distribution or behavior. The appearance of Kelp Gulls in the Gulf of Mexico is coincidental to the importation of eggs by Sea World (but Sea World reports no escapes). Perhaps it is best to accept Kelp Gull with a designation that indicates that it may not have a natural origin, but a natural origin can not be discounted at this time.

Literature Cited

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Donna L. Dittman

Steven W. Cardiff

Species: "Kelp" Gull

State: Louisiana Parish or County:

Locality: Curlew Island, Chandeleur chain

Date: 23 July 19 94 No. seen: 4

Observers: Donna Dittmann, Steve Cardiff, Larry O'Meallie

Documentation: sight record (✓); photo (✓); specimen ( ); heard only ( )

Significance: Collectively since 1989, first US records, if ID ever confirmed. One territorial pair. Another territorial adult possibly paired with a Herring Gull or a hybrid Herring x Kelp. Another 3rd-summer bird also present. (over)

For unusual records, give details on reverse side

Presumably, Kelp Gulls based on overall large Herring Gull-like s
and proportions, blackish mantle with little wingtip contras
little white in primary tips, blackish bar on underside of
trailing edge of wing; greenish-yellow legs and feet; an
pale iris/red orbital ring. Relatively large size, bill, l
legs/feet.