

# Louisiana Bird Records Committee

## Rare Bird Documentation

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*Species:* Brown Booby, *Sula leucogaster leucogaster*

*Number of individuals:* One

*Age and Sex:* Adult, possibly female

*Date:* 24 May, 2015

*Location:* Mile 16.4, Lake Pontchartrain Causeway, St. Tammany Parish

*Lat/Long:* Approximately 30.258° N, 90.113° W

*Other Observers:* Mike Harvey, Rachael Herman, Oscar Johnson, and Lauren Solomon

### **Circumstances.**

Having read many reports of Brown Boobies being seen along the Lake Ponchartrain causeway, including up to five individuals, the five of us decided to see if we could find one for ourselves. We drove north, from Metairie to Mandeville, driving fairly slowly and scanning the water with binoculars. At Crossover #2, at approximately mile marker 16.5, our car “suddenly developed an emergency situation”, and we had to pull over. While scanning the water with binoculars, Rachael and I saw an adult Booby fly up from below the level of our vision (possibly from where the bird was perched under the bridge) on the east side of the bridge. It then flew towards us, passing by within five meters of our position. We watched the bird as it circled around, flew back towards us, passed very close once more, then crossed over the bridge to the west side. It then flew around in loose circles, clearly hunting for fish. After observing the bird for several minutes, it flew out of sight, and we departed for the northshore. During the period of our observation, Mike and Oscar were able to take hundreds of photos.

### **Description.**

A medium-sized seabird (larger than a Laughing Gull), generally dark chocolate brown above and white below. Except for bare skin around the base of the bill, the head was entirely dark brown, a darker shade than the back, with which it contrasted obviously. The cutoff between the brown throat and white upper chest was very sharp and clean. The under wing coverts were clean white, though the rest of the wing (primaries, secondaries, upper wing coverts) was dark. The tail was long, brown, and wedge-shaped. The bill was dagger-shaped and was pinkish-yellow fading to yellow facial skin. The bare facial skin was pale yellow, and extended as far back as behind the eye. The bare skin at the lores was somewhat bluish. The feet were yellow-pink.

### **Discussion.**

The identification of this bird was immediate and straightforward. I have seen this species many times before, including hundreds of individuals in Mexico, and 8-10 individuals in California; this is the first time I have seen the species in Louisiana.

I was able to somewhat confidently identify this bird to subspecies based on the very dark, blackish-brown head contrasting markedly with the warmer chocolate-brown back. Apparently this is a field mark for *S.l.leucogaster*, the subspecies that breeds on islands in the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean; this is also by far the most likely subspecies based on range.

Pyle, 2008 indicates that yellow facial skin with a darker, bluish patch in the lores, is a somewhat reliable methods for sexing Brown Boobies female.

### **Literature Cited.**

Pyle, P. 2008. *Identification Guide to North American Birds, Part II*. Slate Creek Press, Pt Reyes Station, California.