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Individuo de Tapaculo de Ancash (*Scytalopus affinis*) en la provincia de Santiago de Chuco, departamento de La Libertad. Foto: F. León.

Documentation of a Laughing Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) in Loreto, Peru

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RESUMEN

En este artículo se reporta un registro fotográfico y se documenta los escasos registros de Gaviota Reidora (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) del río Amazonas, en el departamento de Loreto, Perú. Se discute la presencia de este presunto divagante en el contexto de observaciones previas de la especie en la Amazonía occidental.

Palabras claves: Gaviota Reidora, *Leucophaeus atricilla*, Loreto, Perú, río Amazonas.

ABSTRACT

In this paper I document a vagrant Laughing Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) from the Amazon River in the department of Loreto, Peru and discuss this observation in the context of other observations for this species in western Amazonia.

Key words: Amazon, Laughing Gull, *Leucophaeus atricilla*, Loreto, Peru.

On February 6, 2012 I was returning to Iquitos from Muyuna Lodge with guide Moises Gerineldo Chávez V. in a fast boat, when I spotted a Laughing Gull perched with Large-billed Terns (*Phaetusa simplex*) on tree debris in the river near the west bank of the Amazon river, ~10-15 minutes south and upriver of Tamshiyacu in dpto. Loreto, Peru. We turned the boat around and approached the gull for closer inspection and I took a series of photographs of the bird (Figs. 1-5). This location did not appear to be near or associated with any human settlements. We did not have a GPS to record coordinates.

Three published records of Laughing Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) were found for the Amazon basin of Peru. Auca (1998) reports seeing a Laughing Gull at Shivankoreni in dpto. Cusco, but without details or date for this observation. O'Donnell & Gonzalez (2004) report a first basic plumaged Laughing Gull from Tambopata, department of Madre de Dios on December 8, 2001, and mention an unpublished prior observation of eight Laughing Gulls in a group on the Tambopata. Whittaker & Oren (1999) note a Laughing Gull specimen collected in December 1975 at Limoncocha in Peru, however this specimen was actually



Figure 1: Laughing Gull perched next to a Large-billed Tern upriver of Tamshiyacu, Rio Amazonas in the department of Loreto Peru.6 February 2012.



Figure 2: Same birds as in figure 1. In this image, the older and browner secondaries are visible on the Laughing Gull, as are new tertials, and the piano-key pattern of black and white retrices in the tail.



Figure 3: Same Laughing Gull as in Figures 1-2, note detail of tail.



Figure 4-5: Same Laughing Gull as in Figures 1-3.

Peru, however this specimen was actually collected by Dan Tallman along the Napo River near Limoncocha, Prov. Napo, Ecuador (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001) and it remains deposited at the collections of Louisiana State University in the USA. Laughing Gull is absent from the Peruvian Amazon in the range maps in Schulenberg *et al.* (2010), as well as absent from the Amazon river away from the Brazilian coast during the austral summer in the range maps of van Perlo (2009).

An additional sight record for the Rio Juruá in Acre, Brazil on December 9 and 10, 1994 (Whittaker & Oren 1999) claimed to be only the second record for Amazonian Brazil after a bird was observed in Manaus in December 1987. In northern South America, it is usually found along the coasts and only occasionally inland, at Lago de Valencia in Venezuela and at least five records in eastern Ecuador (Hilty & Brown 1986, Hilty 2003, Restall *et al.* 2006, Ridgely & Greenfield 2001). Upon recording the bird, additional observation of Laughing Gull in the Amazon basin from the Birding Peru listserv were requested and obtained. Additional unpublished observations were shared from the Peruvian Amazon near Iquitos, dpto. Loreto. These included an immature Laughing Gull seen at the Malecón waterfront in Iquitos in

2005 by Alfredo Begazo (pers. comm.) and an adult Laughing Gull reported by Simon Thompson (in an email to Barry Walker on 13 December 2007) flying upriver towards Iquitos near Ceiba Tops Lodge, 40 km from Iquitos, in December 2007 (Manuel Plenge pers. comm.).

Given the timing of the observation in February outside the species' breeding season and following the detailed descriptions of plumage and molt in Howell & Dunn (2007), the bird can be aged based on plumage characters visible in photos. The bird is not an adult as it lacks small white tips to the primaries, lacks white scapular and tertial crescents, and pure white tail. In photos of the bird, multiple feather generations are visible. First, the secondaries are old, worn, and faded, with more brown tones contrasting with the grayer back feathers, upper wing coverts, and tertials.

First cycle Laughing Gulls undergo a partial pre-formative molt from late July to December, where they replace upper wing coverts and sometimes tertials (Howell & Dunn 2007), and retaining older secondaries as seen in this bird. Also, the tail appears to have a mix of blackish and white retrices which matches what Howell

& Dunn (2007) describe as a piano-key pattern, often seen in late winter among first cycle birds undergoing their first pre-alternate molt, which typically occurs between January and April. The bird is not in its second-cycle undergoing a partial pre-alternate molt, because a bird at this stage should appear much more like an adult and not show the piano-key tail pattern or brownish secondaries.

The present 2012 observations combined with other site records by Begazo in 2005 and Thompson in 2007 imply that vagrant Laughing Gulls may occur more frequently in Loreto than previously believed. Furthermore, observations by John Arvin and Rich Hoyer (pers. comm.) along the Napo River in Ecuador combined with other published records in western Amazonia (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001, O'Donnell & Gonzalez 2004) also indicate that vagrant Laughing Gulls may be more frequent far upstream in the Amazon Basin. The bird is in its first plumage cycle, which is not surprising as first-year birds are perhaps more likely to vagrate compared to older and more experienced individuals.

I can only speculate where Laughing Gulls in Loreto might originate from. Laughing Gulls winter along Peru's Pacific coast (Schulenberg *et al.* 2010), but would have to cross the Andes to reach the Amazon River in Loreto. Alternatively, Laughing Gulls occur along the Caribbean and Atlantic coasts of northern South America and Brazil to the mouth of the Amazon (Howell & Dunn 2007). Gulls from the Caribbean coast would also have to cross coastal mountains, llanos grasslands and or tepuis to reach Amazonia, or follow a difficult route up from the Orinoco delta up the Orinoco to where it connects with the Amazon basin, and back downstream to the main trunk of the Amazon, and finally from there upstream to where I observed it. Gulls from the Atlantic

coast could potentially fly from the mouth of the Amazon directly upstream into Peru and Ecuador without departing a major waterway or crossing a mountain barrier. Therefore, I speculate this latter Atlantic route from the mouth of the Amazon to be most likely, although there are two Andean records of single Laughing Gulls at or above 3,300 m from Ecuador (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001).

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