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First Record of the Mew Gull for Oklahoma

By JAMES W. ARTERBURN

At Hobie Point on Lake Hefner in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma on the morning of 25 January 2002 at around 11:25, I observed an adult Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) in a large flock of Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) and Bonaparte's Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*). This gull was noticeably smaller and darker mantled than the Ring-billed Gulls and larger and darker mantled than the Bonaparte's Gulls. The head was small and rounded with large dark eyes, and the yellow bill was thin and small with a faint dark ring towards the tip and no noticeable gonydeal angle. The head and neck were mostly white with some light brown smudging on the nape. The bird had a dark gray mantle that appeared to be about the same shade of gray as on a California Gull (*Larus californicus*). The broad white tertial crescents and the large white scapular crescents on this bird contrasted noticeably with the dark gray of the mantle and scapulars. The legs were yellow. At rest the primaries were black with



Fig. 1. Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) in Oklahoma County, Oklahoma, 25 January 2002. This bird was the first record for Oklahoma. Photograph by James W. Arterburn.

white tips. These white primary tips were more pronounced than those on Ring-billed Gulls. In flight the upperparts were dark gray. The secondaries had a broad white trailing edge, as did the inner primaries. The outer two primaries were mostly black with large white subterminal mirrors with the mirror in p10 being larger. Primaries 5 through 8 had white tongues that were separated from the white primary tips by a narrow black subterminal band.

I notified several people of the bird, and then continued to take photographs (Fig. 1) and notes. At approximately 11:55 the gull left the rest of the flock and flew out towards the middle of the lake where I lost sight of it. I stayed at Lake Hefner looking for the gull until 17:15 but was unable to relocate it. Several observers looked for the gull over the next week, but it was not seen again.

Based upon the photographs I was able to obtain, the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee accepted this record on 5 April 2002 as the first Oklahoma record of the Mew Gull.

The Mew Gull breeds from central and southern Alaska to western Canada. It winters mainly along the Pacific coast south to California. It is rare inland in the Pacific states and casual east to the Great Lakes. Among the states adjacent to Oklahoma, there are no records of the Mew Gull for Missouri (W. Rowe, pers. comm.) or Arkansas (K. Nichols, pers. comm.). In Kansas there are seven accepted records through 2001 (D. Rintoul, pers. comm.). The first Kansas record was an adult at Tuttle Creek Reservoir in Riley County on 17 December 1995, and the last was an adult seen again at Tuttle Creek Reservoir in Riley County on 7 February 1999. In Texas there are eighteen accepted records through 2001 (M. Lockwood, pers. comm.). The first Texas record was at Ft. Hancock in Hudspeth County from 1 January through 13 February 1988. Starting in the mid 1990s Texas has had an average of two to three birds a year with the last record being 23–24 January 2001 at Lake Worth in Tarrant County.

For assistance in verifying the regional occurrence of the Mew Gull, I thank Mark Lockwood, Kenny Nichols, Dave Rintoul and William Rowe.

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Purple Gallinules Nesting at Red Slough, Oklahoma

BY W. DAVID ARBOUR

This paper documents the occurrence and nesting of the Purple Gallinule (*Porphyryla martinica*) at Red Slough Wildlife Management Area, McCurtain County, Oklahoma. The first observation of the species at Red Slough was on 28 May 2000 when I found a single individual at unit #37.

No subsequent sightings of this species occurred at Red Slough in 2000. However, on 23 April 2001, I discovered the remains of a depredated Purple Gallinule on the north levee of Bittern Lake. On 2 May 2001, Steve Webber and I found a single Purple Gallinule on the southwest part of unit #27. Steve was able to get video footage of the bird. The next day, numerous members of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society observed two Purple Gallinules in the same area. After these initial sightings, up to eight Purple Gallinules were seen regularly in this general area through 25 July 2001. At least five and possibly six territories were noted in the area during this period.

On 13 June 2001, Steve Webber and I heard a gallinule call from a clump of rushes near the southwest corner of unit #27 adjacent to Lotus Lake's east levee. At this same site the week before, I had watched a gallinule disappear into a clump of rushes in the general area from which the call came. Scanning the clumps of rushes, I noticed one clump with the stems broken and bent over in a crosshatched pattern. As we watched, a second bird called to our right and then flew over and landed a few yards from this clump of rushes. It then walked in a straight line toward the now suspected nest. It disappeared in some dense vegetation about 1 m from the suspected nest. We then saw a bird come back out the same way. I looked at the suspected nest just in time to see a gallinule, carrying a small yellow leaf in its bill, enter the suspected nest. Evidently, we had witnessed an exchange of incubation duty. In order to confirm that this was indeed a nest, Steve and I waded through the armpit-deep water of the borrow ditch to get to the shallow, vegetated water of the suspected nest site. As we approached the clump, I saw the stems move as the bird slipped out the backside. When we reached the site, we found a bowl-shaped nest containing six cream-colored eggs with brown speckling at their round ends. There were two small yellow leaves lying in the nest next to the eggs. The nest was in the middle of the rush clump about 0.3 m above the water. Water depth there was about 0.5 m. On 19 June from the Lotus Lake levee, I used a spotting scope and saw an adult gallinule sitting on this nest.

On 3 July, in one of the other gallinule territories, George and Martha Kamp, Lou and Mary Truex, and I found an adult gallinule with a single downy chick sitting in the rushes sunbathing. The chick appeared to be about two weeks old. An adult and chick were observed again at this location on 5 July. On 15 August 2001, I observed a juvenile Purple Gallinule in this same general area.

The Oklahoma Bird Records Committee has accumulated four records for this species in Oklahoma since 1986. Three were during the period of May/June of 1996 in McCurtain and Choctaw Counties (J. Arterburn, pers. comm.); the fourth was of a bird found dead 4 July 1991 in Atoka County (J. Grzybowski, pers. comm.). Prior to 1986, the bird was described by Baumgartner and Baumgartner (Oklahoma bird life, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1992) as a rare and local migrant confined largely to eastern and central Oklahoma, generally seen from early May to early Au-

gust. Nesting data include extreme dates of 12 June 1965 and 10 August 1963. W. Marvin Davis found 16 adult birds (five pairs with nests, two pairs without nests, and two single birds.) at the Durant Fish Hatchery in 1963 (Baumgartner and Baumgartner 1992). Apparently Purple Gallinules were regular at this site from 1961 to 1965, when habitat change led to the birds' extirpation.

In Arkansas, the species is described as a local migrant and summer resident in small numbers in the lowlands with numerous records including a colony of 40 birds observed at Grassy Lake in Hempstead County in southwestern Arkansas in 1980 (James and Neal, Arkansas birds: their distribution and abundance, Univ. Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, 1986). Grassy Lake is approximately 65 km east of Red Slough. Large numbers of Purple Gallinules also occurred in the past on the Grand Prairie of Arkansas in shallow, open ponds originally constructed for rice and fish culture then later allowed to fall into disuse, with subsequent development of marshy vegetation (James and Neal 1986). Because the habitat on the Grand Prairie has recently returned to agriculture, Purple Gallinules seldom occur there anymore.

The habitat favored by the Purple Gallinules at Red Slough consisted of a large shallow water impoundment with deeper water in the borrow areas along the levees. The vegetation there consisted of 1-m tall rushes (*Juncus* sp.) mixed with floating primrose willow (*Ludwigia peploides*). The birds appeared to use the floating primrose willow for walking on and foraging and the rushes for cover, nesting, and sunbathing. The birds were most frequently encountered in this vegetation near the edge of the deeper water of the borrow area. The habitat at the Durant Fish Hatchery in the 1960s was similar and consisted of a series of fish ponds that had become choked with vegetation such as cattails, lotus, and tall rushes, and the gallinules persisted there until the vegetation was removed from the ponds (Baumgartner and Baumgartner 1992).

The nesting of Purple Gallinules at Red Slough may represent a response to appropriate habitat similar to that at the Durant Fish Hatchery in the early 1960s. However, unlike the habitat at the Durant Fish Hatchery and the rice and fish farms on the Grand Prairie of Arkansas, the habitat at Red Slough should persist and provide a permanent habitat for this species. Purple Gallinules may also start occurring in other prime wetlands in southeastern Oklahoma similar to Red Slough that are now being constructed on private lands by the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

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