

FIELD NOTES

FIRST REPORT OF THE SABINE'S GULL IN KENTUCKY

On the morning of 9 September 1984, the authors independently discovered an immature Sabine's Gull (*Larus sabini*) at the Falls of the Ohio, Kentucky-Indiana. Andres first saw the bird at approximately 8:30 a.m. as it perched on the fossil shelf that extends southwest from the Indiana bank, and then as it fed and rested along the pools of water of the outer fossil shelf. Palmer-Ball first observed the bird about an hour later and immediately initiated the local bird alert.

Subsequent to the September 9 sightings, it was discovered that the Sabine's Gull had been observed at the Falls on the afternoon of September 8 by Garrett Adams who had not known the bird's identity. His detailed description of the bird left no doubt that he had indeed seen it on the previous afternoon.

Over the next three days, many birders were fortunate enough to observe the Sabine's Gull as it foraged and rested at various locations throughout the Falls of the Ohio area, including Indiana portions of the Falls. The bird remained in the vicinity until the evening of September 11 when it was last seen about 6:30 p.m. The Sabine's Gull was very tame and repeatedly allowed close approach. On the afternoon of September 11 it ate about 20 small, live minnows that were tossed to it from as close as 15 feet by several local birders.

In flight, the species' diagnostic, as well as strikingly beautiful, wing pattern of black, white and gray-brown triangles was unmistakable. At rest the "scaley" appearance produced by the light-edged back feathers and upper wing coverts identified the gull as a 1st-year bird (see cover photo of this issue). In addition, it had a slightly forked tail with sub-terminal black band and only a narrow whitish edge to the tips of the retrices. The gray-brown of the back continued up the nape onto the crown and along the sides of the throat and upper breast. The forehead was white, and the bill was relatively short and slim and entirely black. The eye was dark and the legs and feet were grayish with a slight tinge of olive and blue in varying lights. The bird was relatively small, being only slightly larger than a Common Tern that perched nearby on several occasions.

This is the first record of the Sabine's Gull for Kentucky and the first record away from Lake Michigan for Indiana. Photographs of the bird were obtained on September 9 and 11.

Interestingly, on the afternoon of September 30, Palmer-Ball observed a Sabine's Gull at the Falls of the Ohio. Although the gull was observed at some distance, the distinctive wing pattern was immediately evident. In fact, the bird was observed only in flight as it moved with strong wingbeats (presumably migrating) down the river channel southwest of the fossil beds. Upon reaching the lower dam structure, it gained altitude and passed over it, heading straight downstream. If a different individual, this gull probably passed by the Falls and continued down the river, choosing to rest somewhere else.

It was originally presumed that this was a different bird because

there were no sightings of Sabine's Gull reported during the intervening three-week period. However, on the afternoon of 5 October 1984 Barry Nichols reported a first-year Sabine's Gull resting at the Falls of the Ohio with a small group of Ring-billed Gulls. This individual flew around briefly, then disappeared with the Ring-bills when something scared them. It was not observed later that afternoon, nor over the next few days.

It remains unclear how many Sabine's Gulls were actually observed at the Falls of the Ohio, but the occurrences of one, two or even three individuals are possible. It also remains to be seen whether or not these sightings were part of a regionwide flight for the species during the fall of 1984. — BRAD ANDRES, 506 Springhill Drive, Lexington and BRAINARD PALMER-BALL, JR., 8207 Old Westport Road, Louisville.

RUNT EGG IN THE CARDINAL

Runt egg in the Cardinal. — Unusually small or runt eggs are extremely rare, with very few reports on the occurrence of such eggs in nature. Among the few species or groups in which runt eggs have been reported are the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*), gulls (*Larus spp.*), House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*), Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) and several woodpeckers (*Picidae*) (Koenig, Wilson Bull. 92:169-176, 1980). In each of these the incidence of runt eggs is extremely low, ranging from 0.02% in gulls to 0.6% in the Canada Goose. In one exceptional species, the Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*), the percentage of runt eggs has been reported to be 4.32% (Koenig, 1980). On 22 July 1983 I found a runt egg in a Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) nest located in the Central Kentucky Wildlife Management Area, 11 miles SSE of Richmond, Madison County. The nest also contained two normal eggs. The normal eggs subsequently hatched on 2 August and the young fledged on 14 August. The runt egg measured 14.33 x 12.86 mm as compared with 25.3 x 18.2 mm and 21.8 x 16.8 mm given by Bent (U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 237, 1968) as the average and smallest measurements, respectively, for Cardinal eggs. The egg showed no evidence of embryonic development and contained no yolk. The absence of yolk has also been noted in the runt eggs of other species (Romanoff and Romanoff, The Avian Egg, Wiley and Sons, New York, 1949). During 1982 and 1983 I examined a total of 33 Cardinal nests containing 86 eggs and the runt egg just described was the only one found. Further, I could find no other reports in the literature of runt eggs in Cardinals.

Little is known about runt eggs. Physiologically, such eggs are apparently produced by temporary disturbances, accidents, or infections in the oviduct (Romanoff and Romanoff, 1949). Very few are thought to be the result of permanent abnormalities (Pearl and Curtis, J. Agric. Res. 6:977-1042, 1916). The only species with a fairly high incidence of runt eggs appears to be the Acorn Woodpecker. Koenig (1980) indicated that this high incidence of runt eggs was associated with the communal nesting habits of these woodpeckers. That is, as females attempt to maneuver within the nest cavities they may come in contact with each other or the walls of the cavity. The increased levels of disturbance caused by such physical contact may subsequently result in the production of runt eggs. — Gary Ritchison, Dept. of Biological Sciences, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY 40475.