

PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES

13. Yellow-nosed Albatross



Photograph by Joseph R. Jehl

Two miles off Jones Beach, Nassau Co., 29 May 1960

The Yellow-nosed Albatross, *Diomedea chlororhynchos*, ranges widely through the South Atlantic and southern Indian Oceans. The smallest of the southern mollymauks, with a wing span of 6-6½ feet, it is known to breed only on Gough Island and the Tristan de Cunha group, in the South Atlantic, and on St. Paul Island in the Indian Ocean (A.O.U. Check-list, 1957: 10).

Perhaps one of the best known of the state's accidentals is an adult Yellow-nosed Albatross approached within 40 feet by about 60 observers, two miles off Jones Beach, Nassau Co., on 29 May 1960. For full details see Bull, *Linn. News-letter*, 14(4): June 1960, and Bull, *Auk*, 78: 425-426, 1961.

Rather than reproduce the previously published photograph of the

bird resting on the water, which clearly shows the identifying color of the upper mandible, a photograph of it taking flight is shown instead. Note the characteristic under-wing pattern of the species: a large central area of white with well defined margins, a little wider in front than behind. For a recent discussion on "Albatross identification in the North Atlantic" see *British Birds*, 59: 376-384, 1966.

Most writers usually ignore mention of a single albatross feather found by David G. Nichols at Jones Beach on 7 November 1948. The feather, in the American Museum of Natural History collection (uncatalogued), was thought by Robert C. Murphy to belong to *D. chlororhynchos*. "While it is very worn, it appears to have been not long moulted . . . and was, in all probability, a naturally moulted feather" (*Auk*, 67(3): 379-380, 1950).

Elsewhere in eastern North America Yellow-nosed Albatrosses have been reported on several occasions:

1. A bird collected on 20 August 1885 near the mouth of the Moisie River, Quebec (Dionne, 1906: 61-62, *Les Oiseaux de la Province de Quebec*, Dussault & Proulx, Quebec). There is some question about the year; some authors state 1884 (Palmer, *Handbook of North American Birds*, vol. 1, 1962: 135). Originally in the Musée de l'Université Laval, Quebec, the specimen is now presumably in the collection of Le Séminaire de Québec (G. Filteau, *in litt.*).
2. An adult collected near Machias Seal Island, off the coast of Maine on 1 August 1913 by Ernest O. Joy (*Auk*, 39: 58-65, 1922) is now no. 748984 in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History, New York.
3. Norton (*Auk*, 51: 507-508, 1934) recorded an unidentified albatross seen by E. D. Rackliff "on one of his trips to the Cod Ledges [Maine], earlier in the summer." Presumably this means 1934. Quoting this same paper Palmer (*Maine Birds*, Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool., 102: 28-29, 1949) interprets this as meaning 1913, and gives the location of the "Cod Ledges" as "off Casco Bay," Cumberland Co.
4. Norton (*op. cit.*) also reported the finding of a Yellow-nosed Albatross by a small boy, about 40 miles from the coast, in East Fryeburg, Oxford Co., Maine, a few days prior to 23 July 1934. The bird died, was mounted, and is now in the collection of the Portland Society of Natural History, Portland, Maine. C. M. Packard informs me (*in litt.*) that it is an adult.
5. A bird seen on 13 July 1958, 20 miles southeast of New Smyrna Beach, Brevard Co., Florida by James B. Johnson, Jr. (*Aud. Field Notes*, 12(5): 406, Oct. 1958). Johnson, who is familiar with the species from the South Atlantic, informs me (personal communication) that the bird, an adult, was approached within 25 feet and was well seen by all 20 persons aboard.

6-7. Mark Libby, who, like Johnson, spends a large part of the year fishing offshore, but in Maine waters, and who also gained familiarity with albatrosses while in the Navy, has seen Yellow-nosed Albatrosses on two occasions in the vicinity of Monhegan Island, Lincoln Co.: 21 March 1960 (*Records of New England Birds*, 16 (3), March 1960) and 12 May 1964 (*Records of New England Birds*, 20(5), May 1964). The 21 May 1960 date given by Palmer (*Handbook . . . op. cit.*) for the former report is incorrect, as is the 21 May 1960 date given by Bourne (*Ibis*, 109: 148, 1967) for the latter report.

Both birds were adults. The 1960 individual followed Libby's boat for four miles. He then stopped the boat and fed the bird fish scraps within a distance of 40 feet. The 1964 albatross came even closer: within a foot or two of Libby's hand as he fed it fish entrails (Libby, *in litt.*)!

Elsewhere in the North Atlantic there is a "probable" record of a Yellow-nosed Albatross collected near Iceland about 1844, and one "possible" record from France in 1889 (Bourne, *op. cit.*).

The only other albatross likely to occur in our area is the Black-browed (*D. melanophris*), which is the commonest southern vagrant in the North Atlantic. There are a number of old European records (including specimens), and in recent years there have been numerous sight records from the British Isles (Bourne, *op. cit.*). Elsewhere in the North Atlantic specimens have been taken off Greenland in the end of August 1935 (Horring & Salomonsen, *Medd. om Gronland*, 131(5): 59-60, 1941), and off Martinique on 12 November 1956 (Bond, *Fourth Supplement to the Check-list of Birds of the West Indies* (1956), Acad. Nat. Sciences, Phila., 1959: 10).

As pointed out by Bourne (*op. cit.*) the distribution of these two species of albatrosses in the North Atlantic tends to follow a distinct pattern. The Black-browed occurs in the higher (colder) latitudes of the north and east while the Yellow-nosed occurs in lower (warmer) latitudes of the west and south. There are as yet no records of the Black-browed Albatross from the United States or Canada. The one November record from Martinique, which lies in the path of the northeast trade-winds, probably represents a bird on return passage to the southern hemisphere.

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