

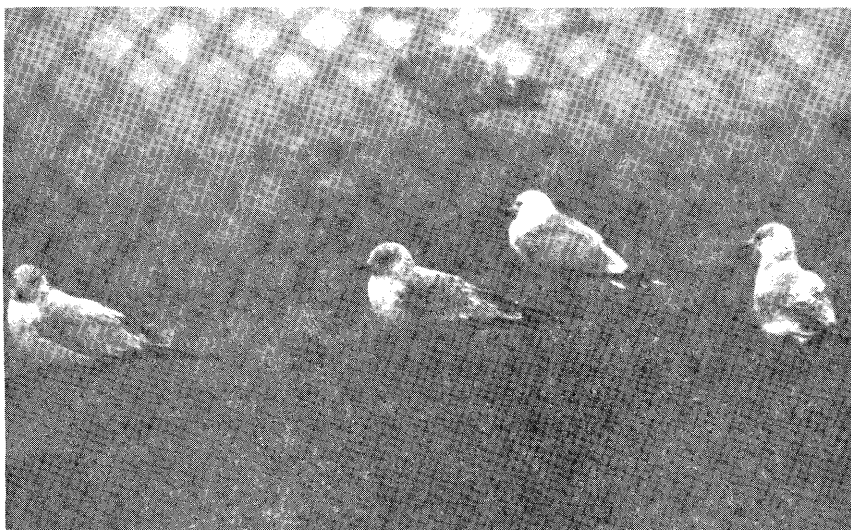
PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES
26. MEW GULL
A FIRST FOR NEW YORK STATE

ANTHONY J. LAURO

On 19 February 1977, I observed a first-year Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) on a baseball field adjacent to Argyle Lake Park, Babylon, Suffolk County.

The bird was in a group of about 100 Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*). Ring-billed Gulls are quite common in winter on Long Island, the birds favoring grassy areas adjacent to bodies of water. Several hundred birds frequent the Argyle Lake area and for years I have checked this field seeking *L. canus*.

On the day of the observation, I noted that one individual was unique. Its bill was not only very dark, but was also quite short. Since the day was foggy and damp with strong northwest winds, the birds were sitting with their heads drawn into their bodies, making it difficult to judge the size of their heads.



MEW GULL (*Larus canus*)
Argyle Lake Park, Babylon, Suffolk County, N.Y.
19 February 1977 Photo by Anthony J. Lauro

As the birds were somewhat stationary in their hunched up positions, I rushed home to get my camera equipment, as well as my daughter Brook Lauro for assistance. We stopped at a store for some bread, which Brook threw over the fence surrounding the field, to induce the gull to come closer. The bird, which when seen initially, was about 60 meters away, now approached to within 15 meters, at which point I photographed it. I was also now able to see that not only was the bill very short and dark, but that the head of the bird was distinctly smaller than those of the surrounding Ring-billed Gulls. The photograph was taken with a Minolta SR-7 equipped with a 400mm lens.

The following day, 20 Feb., the Mew Gull was seen by Barbara Spencer and Tom Davis.

This is the first record of this bird for New York State. The consensus of those verifying this record is that it is a member of an Old World population of this species, which breeds in Europe and Asia, with some birds breeding as far west as Iceland. The reason that the bird is not of the western North American race (*L. c. brachyrhynchus*) is the shape of the bill, which differs in the two birds.

Two Mew Gulls of the western North American race were collected on the Canadian side of the Niagara frontier area in the fall of 1967, (Andrle and Axtell, *Wilson Bulletin*, Vol. 81, No. 2; June 1969). An adult Mew Gull was reported at Hammonasset State Park, Conn., in Nov., 1973. Another adult has been reported from the Merrimack River, Newburyport, Mass., for the past few winters.

I wish to thank the following persons who examined the slides and confirmed the identity of the bird: Mr. Guy McCaskie, San Diego Natural History Museum; Mr. Will Russell, Seal Harbor, Maine; Mr. John M. O'Sullivan, Rarities Committee, British Birds, RSPB, Sandy, Bedfordshire, England. Also, thanks to Dr. Robert F. Andrle, Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences, for his helpful comments and assistance.

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