

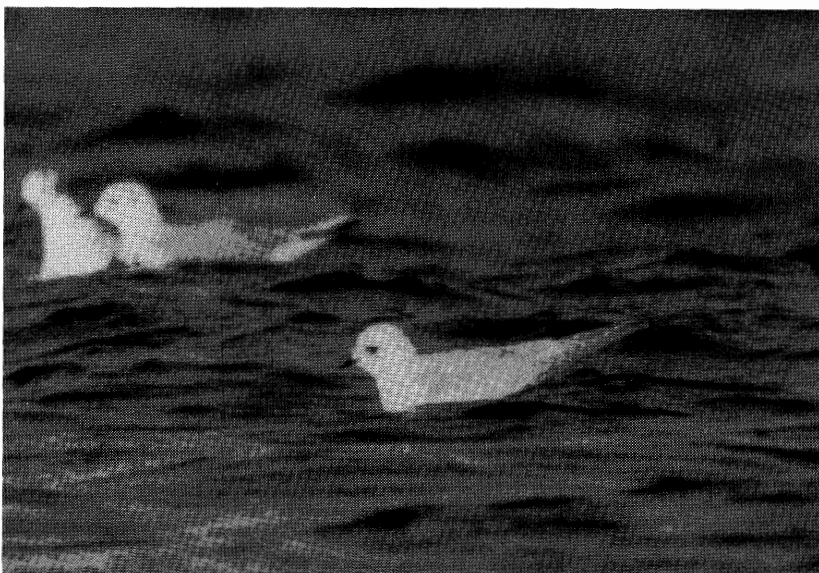
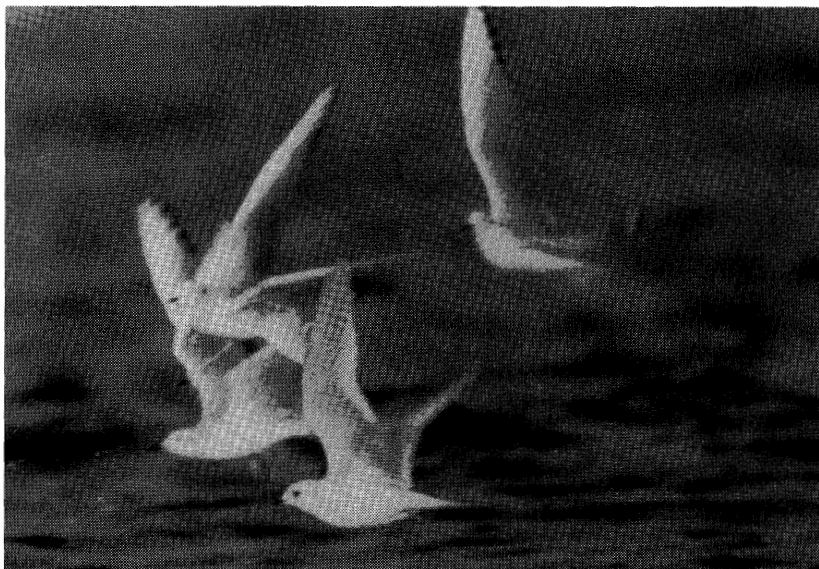


Figure 1. Adult Ross's Gull in flight (above) and swimming (below) at Point Lookout, Nassau County, New York, 17-30 March 1994. Photographs by Tom Vezo.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES 62: ROSS'S GULL IN NASSAU COUNTY

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It was St. Patrick's Day, 17 March 1994, when the author in company with Lester Feldman and Alvin Wollin made a biweekly winter visit to view Jones Inlet from the Point Lookout side in Nassau County. As usual, there were hundreds of Bonaparte's Gulls, some in flight, some in the water, and some sitting on sand bars in the inlet. We had come to search for the Little and Common Black-headed Gulls which had been seen there the previous weekend. While looking over the assembled birds, my eye was drawn to one bird that was sitting on a sandbar about 300 feet from us in a group of some thirty or forty Bonaparte's Gull. It had a distinctly pink flush on its breast. I called this to the attention of my companions and we immediately each trained our scopes on the bird.

It was visibly smaller than the Bonaparte's Gulls. It had a distinctly shorter bill than Bonaparte's Gull and its bill was all black. As it turned its head from side to side, it looked as if the bill had a pale base on one side. Later examination with 60 power lens, however, showed that to be feathering on the base on that side. At that point, I suspected that we were looking at a Ross's Gull, but the bird was head on and did not afford a total view. We could see that the head and neck were white, and the eye appeared to be large and black, and there was a small post-ocular smudge. However, the bird showed no inclination to reveal the rest of itself. Asking my companions to keep on eye on our quarry, I rushed to the car which was parked several hundred yards away in order to consult Grant (1986). I hurried back with the book as fast I could. When I arrived and was told the bird had flown and was lost in the myriad Bonaparte's Gull that were swirling through the air, my heart sank. However, it suddenly put down again in approximately the same spot where we had found it, giving us the same frontal view. After about half an hour, it took off again, and this time the distinctive wedge-shaped tail was observed, as well as the extensive white area in the trailing edge of the wings, and the gray underwings. When the bird was observed floating in the water, the outer primary showed as a complete black edge on the closed wing (Fig. 1). The mantle was very light gray, much lighter than the mantle of a Bonaparte's Gull. Its legs were dull red.

Now that we were sure of what we were seeing, it was time to alert local birders. Unfortunately, I could not find a working phone in Point Lookout and had to return all the way to Jones Beach to use a telephone. The only number I knew by heart was Berna Lincoln's in Somers, Westchester County. Luckily, she was home and called Tony Lauro at his office in Nassau County. We then rushed back to Point Lookout, relocated the bird and soon we were joined by Tony, John Fritz, and Pat Lindsay, whom Tony had contacted at once. Several more people arrived that first day after we left and saw the bird. As expected, when word got around about the find, birders started pouring in from near and far. The Point Lookout authorities very obligingly opened the small parking lot just west of the jetty to accommodate cars and, in general, were cooperative. Nobody kept count, but I believe it is quite safe to say that the inlet was visited by several hundred birders over the next couple of weeks. The Ross's Gull was seen again on 18, 20, 22, and, I believe for the last time, 30 Mar.

The only previous record from New York State is of a single bird seen at Montauk, Suffolk Co., on 11 December 1986 (Reddall 1988). The main breeding grounds of Ross's Gull is northern Siberia. It has nested sporadically in other arctic and subarctic locations and evidently continues to nest in small numbers in northeastern Manitoba at Churchill. It appears to winter primarily at sea in arctic waters.

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LITERATURE CITED

- Grant, P. J. 1986. *Gulls: A Guide to Identification*. 2nd Ed. Buteo Books, Vermillion, South Dakota. 352 pp.
- Reddall, J. 1988. First Record of a Ross' Gull for New York State. *Kingbird* 38:5-7.