

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

ADDITION TO THE NEW YORK STATE CHECKLIST

The New York State Avian Records Committee (NYSARC) has voted unanimously to add one new species to the New York State Checklist under the new 'accelerated review' policy (NYSARC 2009, Kingbird 59(3): 235). This addition is:

Gray-hooded Gull (*Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus*)

A predominantly equatorial and southern hemispheric species, this smart-looking gull was discovered on 24 July 2011 by Sara Burch and Jacob McCartney whilst walking on the shorefront at Coney Island, Brooklyn (King's Co.). Understandably, the observers assumed from the red bill and legs and partial hood that this was likely to be a Black-headed Gull (*C. ridibundus*) and secured photographs. These were shared with eBird reviewer Doug Gochfeld, who immediately re-identified the bird as a Gray-hooded Gull, a species not illustrated in any North American field guide. Hundreds of birders from all over the country were able to see the gull during its 12-day stay and the presence of this avian rarity, just steps from the famous Coney Island boardwalk and amusement park, attracted the attention of the news media including the *New York Times*. The Coney Island gull was beautifully documented in the form of nine detailed reports (NYSARC 2011-30-A/I), the majority accompanied by convincing color photographs. This not only constitutes the first record for New York State but is only the second record for the US and Canada, the previous record being a one-day bird photographed by a researcher near Apalachicola, Florida on 26 Dec 1998 (McNair, D. B. 1999. The Gray-hooded Gull in North America: First documented record. *North American Birds* 53:337–339).

The Committee carefully considered the possibility of an escape or some other mode of human assistance but could not find any evidence for this. Gray-hooded Gulls are known to wander north along the coast of Brazil on a regular basis, where they come into contact with wintering Laughing Gulls (*Leucophaeus atricilla*). Testifying to the natural affinity between these two species, there is a record of a vagrant Laughing Gull nesting with Gray-hooded Gull in Senegal on the west coast of Africa (Erard, C., Guillou, J. J., and Mayaud, N. 1984. Sur l'identité spécifique de certains Larides nicheurs au Senegal. *Alauda* 52:84-188.). The Coney Island bird spent much of its time with Laughing Gulls and the idea that it followed their migration is compelling. Alternatively, the gull could have traveled to the Caribbean from the Pacific coast of South America via the Isthmus of Panama where there have been multiple records. It is also possible the gull originated in West Africa and crossed the Atlantic to the Caribbean or northern coast of South America before moving northwards. By odd coincidence, this would mirror the proposed route for New York's first and only Western Reef-Heron (*Egretta gularis*) observed just a short distance away in the Coney Island Creek (NYSARC 2007-34-A/K).

A record of Gray-hooded Gull from the Lesser Antillean island of Barbados, a frequent landfall for Old-World vagrants, lends support to this as an alternative possibility.

As is customary, full details of this exciting record and the context for acceptance will be published in the 2011 NYSARC Annual Report. With this inclusion, the NYS Checklist now stands at 480 species.

Submitted on behalf of the **New York State Avian Records Committee**: Angus Wilson (Chair), Jeanne Skelly (Secretary), Jeffrey S. Bolsinger, Thomas W. Burke, Willie D'Anna, Andrew Guthrie, Tom Johnson and Dominic Sherony.