

A Pelagic Purple Gallinule Rescue

The purpose of this note is to clarify the location of origin of this unusual and well-publicized Purple Gallinule record, and to report on the outcome of this most unusual story. It was prepared in part from information excerpted from an article which appeared in the *Southampton Press* on 7 February, 2013 and from an account in the Spring 2013 issue of the wildlife rehabilitator's newsletter, *Wild Life Line*.

On 15 January, while returning from a week-long fishing trip in the waters 75 miles south of Nantucket, the co-captain of the vessel *The Bookie* spotted an unusual bird on the water and asked the captain to back up, which he did. The crew dropped a fishing basket in the water and the bird, flapping and obviously in distress, climbed in readily.

The captain of the ship, Frank Green, brought the bird up to the pilothouse and offered it food and fresh water, which it refused. But during the two remaining days it took to reach their Hampton Bays destination, the bird seemed to acclimate itself to the surroundings, wrapping its long toes around the controls and "rocking with the waves."

"We knew it was a bird that didn't belong out there," said Captain Green. But he didn't know just how unusual it was until he brought it to the Evelyn

Alexander Wildlife Refuge Center in Hampton Bays on 17 January, and a veterinarian identified it as a Purple Gallinule.

The bird was dehydrated and hypothermic (the water temperature was reported to be 58° F) but made a good recovery in the capable hands of the staff at the rehab center, an excellent facility run by the Director, Virginia Frati. The bird was flown to the Peace River Wildlife Center in Punta Gorda, Florida on 23 April, and was released to the wild on 22 May.

How this bird ended up out in the open Atlantic in the middle of January will remain a puzzling mystery. Equally amazing is the series of fortuitous events that ensued: in the vast ocean, it happened to be in the very path of *The Bookie*; someone's keen eyes actually picked it out on the water from the 67' boat; the crew made the effort to turn back and rescue it; it ended up in the absolute best place to rehabilitate; it got a plane ride back to Punta Gorda; and it actually ended up in its natural wintering habitat!

The Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio martinicus*) winters in marshes in Central and South America, to as far north as the Gulf States in North America. There are more than forty reliable records of this species in New York (J. DiCostanzo, in *Bull's Birds of New York State*, pp. 224-225; NYSARC: <http://www.nybirds.org/NYSARC/RecordsSummary.htm>), but this particularly famous individual is better attributable to Massachusetts, visiting New York only while in care.

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