

**BLACK-HEADED GULLS WINTERING IN SULAWESI
(and notes on their occurrence elsewhere in the In do-Australia region)**

by

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Summary

The numbers and distribution are discussed of the Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* as a wintering visitor in Indonesia and adjacent areas. The first observations during the 1950's were confined to the island of Borneo. Since the beginning of the 1960's, more birds were observed at different sites, especially in the north and east. Most birds were in first winter plumage.

Introduction

The Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* is a common breeding bird of Europe and Asia. It winters in Africa and Asia as far south as the equator (Harrison 1983). Information on its occurrence as a straggler or rare winter visitor to Indonesia is fragmented. During several visits to North Sulawesi in 1986-92, Black-headed Gulls were observed- Its occurrence in Sulawesi is discussed and compared with observations elsewhere in the Indonesian and Australo-Papuan region.

Sulawesi

On 19 January 1986, R. Dekker (pers, comm.) observed two gulls in Manado Bay (1°N, 124°55'E), which he identified as Black-headed Gulls. In December 1990 and January 1991, Black-headed Gulls were seen there on several occasions (pers. obs. see Fig. 1). No gulls were seen during visits on 26 October and 6 November 1990, and the first sighting was on 23 December 1990. Within ten days the number of birds had increased, reaching a maximum of 34 on 3 January 1991. At the end of the month, 29 birds were still present. None were present on 25 February 1991.

In the following year, two first winter Black-headed Gulls were seen at the same site on 8 February 1992.

Description and Age of the Birds

The identification as Black-headed Gulls was based on the following characters:

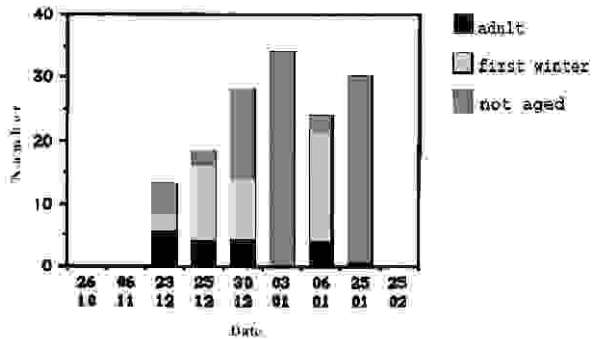
Adult

head: grey-white with dark spot behind the eye;
 body: mantle, scapulars, rump, tail, underparts white;
 wing: upperwing pale grey, outer wing with white leading edge, outer primaries with black tips;
 bill: red;
 legs: red.

First winter

head: as adult;
 body: as adult, tail with black subterminal band;
 wing: median coverts brown, secondaries blackish, primaries with broad blackish-brown tips;
 bill: red-orange with blackish tip;
 legs: dull orange.

Figure 1. Number and age of wintering Black-headed Gulls in Manado Bay, North Sulawesi, October 1990/February 1991.



A size comparison was made with Great Crested Terns *Sterna bergii* with which the gulls were foraging. The wing length of the terns was slightly longer than that of the gulls. While resting, both species were of the same size although the gulls appeared to have a heavier build than the more slender terns. Indian Black-headed Gull *Larus brunnecephalus* was ruled out mainly because of the differences in wing pattern and size. The latter species has a much greater amount of black (adult) or brown (Juvenile) on the primaries. Several photographs of the gulls were taken.

On four occasions birds could be aged, but it was not possible to age all birds because of unfavourable weather. Of 60 birds aged, 17 were adult and 43 in first winter plumage.

Every evening, just after sunset, the birds flew in a north-westerly direction following the coastline at a distance of 200 meters. It was not ascertained where the birds roosted.

Table 1. Observations of wintering Black-headed Gulls In Indonesia and Australia outside Sulawesi

| | Location | Date | Number | Reference |
|----|--|------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|
| | BORNEO | | | |
| 1 | Sarawak, Sabah | regular since 1950 | tens | Smythies 1981 |
| 2 | Seria, Brunei (4.39 N, 114.23 E) | 8-Dec-87 | 1 ad. | Mann 1989 |
| 3 | Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei (4.56 N, 114.58 E) | 3-Jan-89 | 1 | Maim 1989 |
| | THE MOLUCCAS | | | |
| 4 | Ternate (0.48 N, 127.23 E) | 24-Feb-83 26-Feb-83 | 2 ad. 1 | F.G. Rozendaal (pers. comm.) |
| 5 | Ternate | Feb-92 | 19 | K.D. Bishop (in litt.) |
| | IRIAN JAVA | | | |
| 6 | Biak harbour (1.10 S, 136.05 E) | 29-30 Mar 1963 | | King 1979 |
| 7 | Jayapura (2.37 S, 140.39 E) | Apr-63 | 1 1st w. | King 1979 |
| 8 | Sorong (0.50 S, 131.17 E) | Jan-Feb 1986 | 4 1st w. | Bishop & Diamond 1987 |
| 9 | Waigama (1.52 S, 129.49 E) | Jan-86 | 20 | Bishop & Diamond 1987 |
| 10 | Bintuni bay (2.10 S, 133.00 E) | 7-Apr-89 | 1 1st w. | Erfemeijer et al, 1991 |
| | PAPUA NEW GUINEA | | | |
| 11 | Moitaka, Central Province | Jan-79 | 1 1st w. | Finch 1979, 1981 |
| 12 | Moitaka, Central Province | Jan, Mar 1981 | 1 | Finch 1979, 1981 |
| | SOLOMON ISLANDS | | | |
| 13 | Jaba delta (6.19S, 155.13 E) | Jan 1979, 1980 | 6 | Coates 1985 |
| | AUSTRALIA | | | |
| 14 | Broome (17.58 S, 122.15 E) | 19 Nov 1991 | lad. | Andrew & Eades 1991 |

Note: ad. = adult. 1st w. = first winter bird.

Discussion

Black-headed Gulls have been recorded wintering in Indonesia and adjacent areas since the 1950's when they were first observed in Borneo (Smythies 1981, Mann 1989). Wintering birds have also been observed in Singapore annually (D-R. Wells, in litt.). They appear to have expanded their winter range in an easterly direction with the first observation in Irian Jaya being of an immature bird in 1963 (King 1979). Here, as well as in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, Black-headed Gulls have regularly been observed since (Finch 1979, 1981, Coates 1985, Bishop & Diamond 1987, Erfemeijer *et al.*, 1991).

However, no birds were reported from Sulawesi or the Moluccas prior to 1983, when two adults were observed at Temate on 24 February (F.G. Rozendaal pers. comm.). K.D. Bishop (in litt.) reported a group of 19 foraging in Ternate harbour in February 1992, where they were also observed roosting on the roofs of nearby warehouses and homes. They fed on scraps on the wharves and on the water.

All observations of Black-headed Gulls in the Indonesian and Australian regions outside Sulawesi are presented in Table 1.

The Black-headed Gull seems to be a relative newcomer in Indonesian waters. Although these recent observations appear to be at least partly a result of increasing numbers of observers, there seems to be a real tendency for the species to winter further south. The southernmost wintering sites of the Black-headed Gull in Africa and Asia are situated around the equator. The increase of Black-headed Gulls in Indonesia coincides with an increase in Kenya and Tanzania (c/ Cramp & Simmons 1983), while the growing number of birds wintering in eastern Indonesia since the beginning of the 1980's coincided with the first observation in Australia (Andrew & Eades 1991). Several studies on Black-headed Gulls in Europe have shown that first winter birds generally move further south than adults (Cramp & Simmons 1983).

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[Addendum: since the receipt of this manuscript, S. van Balen (pers. comm.) reported 18-20 Black-headed Gulls, all first winter birds, in Manado Bay on 7 Feb 1993. *Ed.*}]