

THE BLACK-HEADED GULL *LARUS RIDIBUNDUS* IN
IRIAN JAYA

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Gulls (Laridae) are a familiar group of birds at temperate and subtropical latitudes in both northern and southern hemispheres. However, they are rarely encountered in the tropics, particularly those of Asia and the Pacific. It is therefore interesting to note a group of 20 Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* apparently over-wintering in Sorong harbour at the extreme western tip of Irian Jaya (New Guinea) in January and February 1986.

The Black-headed Gull breeds throughout Eurasia, and winters regularly to coastal, southern, and eastern Asia (King et al. 1980). In Malaya Hedway C Wells (1976) note that it winters in small numbers; in the Philippines there are a few records from Luzon and Mindanao (Dupont 1971); and in northern Borneo (Sarawak and Sabah) it has been recorded regularly in winter since 1950 (Smythies 1981). Interestingly there appear to be no published records for Indonesia except for two records from Irian Jaya (Coates 1985). However, there are a number of records further to the east including Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea and Bougainville, North Solomon islands (Coates 1985). We first observed Black-headed Gulls in Sorong harbour on 23 January 1986 and subsequently until we departed on 26 January. A single bird was later observed roosting on a rock with a flock of Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* and Crested Terns *Sterna bergii* near Waigama on the north coast of Misool (Raja Empat islands). A flock, presumably the same individuals, was again observed upon our return to Sorong on 25 February 1986.

Most birds seen were in adult winter plumage as described in Grant (1982). The adult winter plumage of the Black-headed Gull is unique in the region and differs markedly from that of the larger (34 - 37 cm to 41 cm) Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiac*. The upperparts were pale grey with a distinctive white flash along the leading edge of the outer wing (clearly seen in flight) and a narrow black edge to the tips of the primaries. The head was distinctly marked by a blackish ear spot and eye crescent, and the underparts were entirely white. The bill was dull red with a dark tip and the legs and feet were orange-red. One or two individuals showed some dark feathering in the crown and nape, suggesting the onset of breeding plumage. In flight the wings appeared slim, noticeably pointed, and the birds flew with a rapid wing beat. The Silver Gull, which is also a rare-to-uncommon visitor to New Guinea (Coates 1985, Bishop pers. obs.), differs from the Black-headed Gull in adult plumage by the lack of any markings about the head, a distinctive white iris and scarlet orbital ring, bright scarlet bill and legs and three white blotches in the black tips of its primaries.

We also observed at least two first-winter birds (see Grant 1982), including the individual on Misool. The birds appeared slightly darker than the others and had a distinctive brown bar across the wing and a dark sub-terminal tail band. Again these differ from similarly aged silver Gulls by the same characters as do the adults. Among other potentially confusing species. Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* can be distinguished by its forked tail and black bill; the Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunicephalus* (which may one day be recorded in the region), by its larger size and distinctive wing pattern.

Individuals were regularly observed swimming within the harbour, flying and stooping at the surface of the water and roosting on a large harbour beacon. One or two individuals flew a few hundred metres inland to a muddy pool where they probed the soft ground with their bills. Although this is only the fourth record of the Black-headed Gull in New Guinea, the relatively large number of birds involved and the lengthy duration of their stay suggests that this species may regularly over-winter in the region. And as suggested by White & Bruce (1986), it should be looked for at other suitable localities in neighbouring islands.

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Ringkasan

Sekelompok burung yang terdiri dari 20 ekor *Larus ridibundus* dapat diamati di pelabuhan laut Sorong pada tanggal 23 - 26 January 1986. Selain itu juga seekor *L. ridibundus* terlihat bersama kelompok burung *Sterna hirundo* dan *S. bergii* dekat Waigaaa di pantai utara Misool (Kep. Raja Btpat). Rupanya burung yang sama terlihat lagi di Sorong pada tanggal 25 February 1966. pengamatan ini merupakan Catalan keempat ditemukannya *L. ridibundus* di New Guinea (Irian Jaya dan PNG). Melihat banyaknya dan lamanya tinggal di daerah ini, mungkin burung ini merupakan pendatang tetap pada waktu musim dingin di belahan buai bagian Utara, seperti halnya sebagai pendatang tetap di Semenanjung Malaysia, Filipina (Luzon dan Mindanao), dan Kalimantan Utara (Malaysia Timur: Sarawak dan Sabah).

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