

## A Record of Great Black-headed Gull (*Larus ichthyaetus*) in Thailand

On 2 April 1989, Nina Higgins, Alan Lewis and I were scanning through flocks of waders and gulls from the pier at Bangpoo, Samut Prakan Province (13° 30'N; 100° 45'E) on the inner gulf of Thailand, about 15 km east of the mouth of the Chao Phraya River when my attention was drawn to an obviously large gull in among ca. 300 Brown-headed Gulls (*Larus brunnicephalus*). We watched the bird standing and preening on the mudflats approximately 150 m from us through 22x telescopes for 10 minutes. On several occasions it made short flights and changed position in the flock. It then flew off east. Although unfamiliar with the species, we tentatively identified it as a first year Great Black-headed Gull (*Larus ichthyaetus*) and took careful field notes.

*Description (Fig. 1):* Size large, estimated to be one and a half times as long and twice as tall as accompanying Brown-headed Gulls. Head and underparts white with a restricted dark mask in front of, and behind, the eye; dark mottling on hindcrown and nape grading into a greyish mantle and scapulars. Coverts were bleached grey-brown, though appeared slightly darker than the back, due to some darker feathers. Primaries were blackish. Bill long and heavy, with basal two-thirds greyish and the tip black. Eyes appeared dark and legs greyish.

In flight there was a prominent dark bar along the secondaries, a pale mid-wing panel and a diffusely darker carpal area. The upper-tail coverts and tail were white with a sharply contrasting broad black band on the tail tip (Figure 1).

The best identification feature was the very distinctive head and profile of the exceptionally long and heavy bill, combined with the shallow sloping forehead. The most likely confusion species, Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), a scarce but annual visitor to Bangpoo, shows a proportionally smaller bill and rounder head. Other supporting features were the clean white underparts, the sharply defined tail band, and the upper-wing pattern. The grey legs were also more indicative of Great Black-headed Gull than Herring Gull which shows flesh-coloured or yellowish legs. The wing pattern was that of a first year bird, probably moulting into first summer plumage. The dark mask did at first seem to be rather limited and indistinct but subsequent searches of photographs (GRANT, 1986, Plates 312, 313 and 319) revealed others with similar head patterns. I have also subsequently observed more than 50 individuals in India and Nepal during Jan.–May 1990, some of which also displayed rather indistinct head patterns but all of which showed the characteristic head shape. I would not therefore regard the presence of a heavy and extensive dark mask as a crucial feature.

Great Black-headed Gulls breed from Central Asia across to Mongolia on inland lakes and seas. They winter from the East Mediterranean, south through the Red Sea, to Yemen and east to Western India, and the Bay of Bengal where Howes and Bakewell (pers. comm.) saw sizeable flocks in Bangladesh in 1989, and are reported as common farther east in the Sea of Japan at Nokhodka Harbour, CIS (HARRISON, 1983). Extralimitals have occurred northwest to Britain, west to Madeira and south to Kenya (HARRISON, 1983). There are also at least five records for Hong Kong (CHALMERS, 1986). This was only the third record for Thailand. The two previous sightings, held on file at the Center

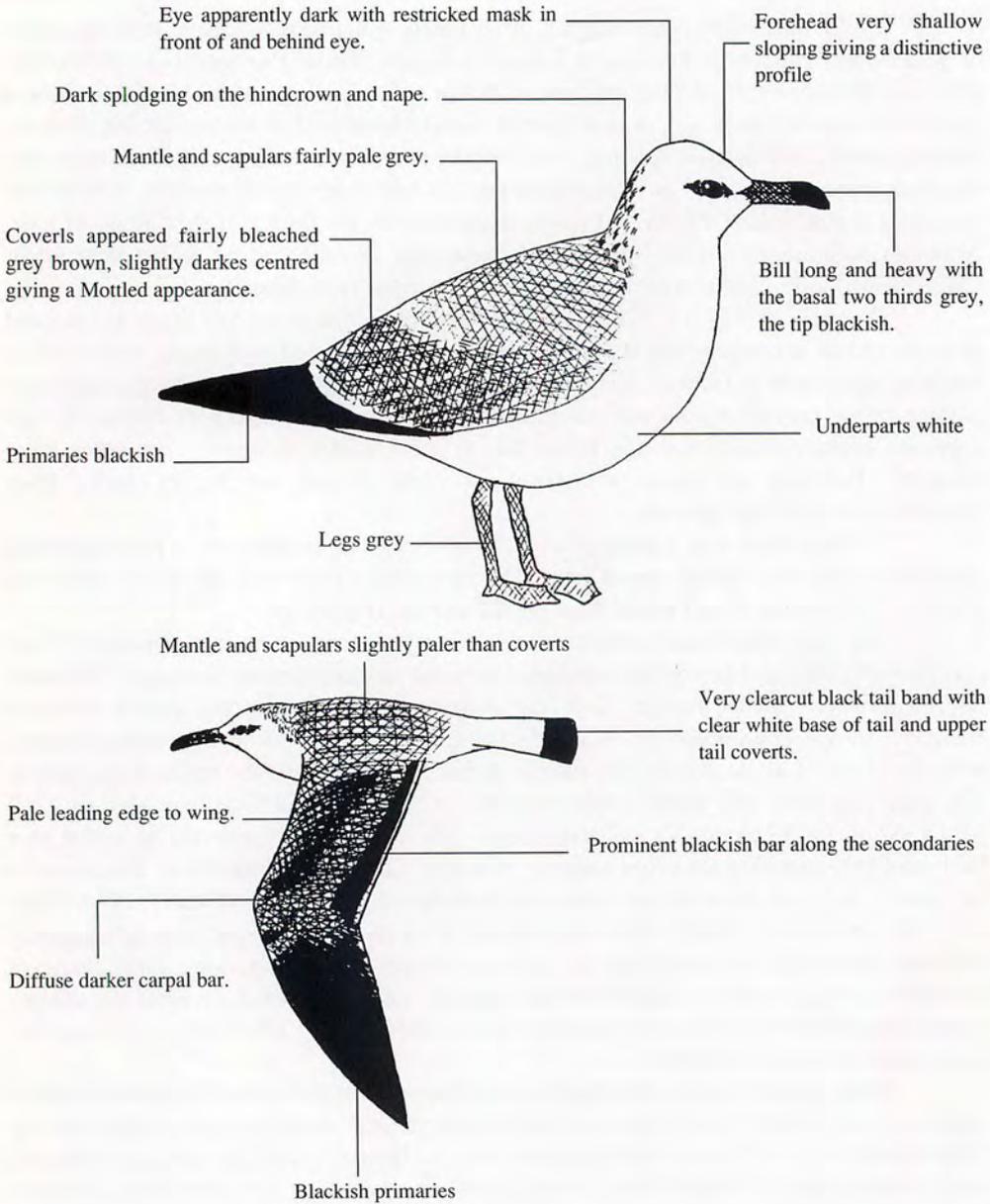


Figure 1. Field observations of Great Black-headed Gull.

for Conservation Biology, Mahidol University, Bangkok, were both made at Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park, Prachuab Khiri Khan Province, in January 1984 and February 1986 (ROUND, in litt.).

## R E F E R E N C E S

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