

LAUGHING GULL

Leucophaeus atricilla

non-breeding visitor, regular winterer

L.a. megalopterus

Laughing Gulls breed primarily along the Pacific coast of Mexico and the Atlantic and Caribbean coasts from s. Canada to Venezuela, and they winter S to Peru and the Amazon delta (AOU 1998, Howell and Dunn 2007). It and [Franklin's Gull](#) were placed along with other gulls in the genus *Larus* until split by the AOU (2008). Vagrant Laughing Gulls have been reported in Europe (Cramp and Simmons 1983) and widely in the Pacific, from Clipperton I to Wake Atoll (Rauzon et al. 2008), Johnston Atoll (records of at least 14 individuals, 1964-2003), Palmyra, Baker, Kiribati, Phoenix, Marshall, Pitcairn, Gambier, and Samoa Is, as well as Australia/New Zealand (King 1967, Clapp and Sibley 1967, Sibley and McFarlane 1968, Pratt et al. 1987, Garrett 1987, Wragg 1994, Higgins and Davies 1996, Vanderwerf et al. 2004; *E* 50:13 [identified as Franklin's Gull], 58:50). Another interesting record is of one photographed attending an observer rowing solo between San Francisco and Australia at 6.5° N, 155° W, about 1400 km S of Hawai'i I, 1-2 Nov 2007. They have been recorded almost annually as winter visitors to the Hawaiian Islands since the mid-1970s, numbers increasing from the NW to the SE, as would be expected of this N American species. The great majority of records involve first-year birds, and there is no evidence for a transient population through the Hawaiian Islands, or of individuals returning for consecutive winters after departing in spring.

There are only eight records from the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands*, from *Midway* (3 Jan-13 Apr 1998, [HRBP](#) 1164-1165, 1194-1195; and 16-28 Apr 2000), *Laysan* (11-16 May 1988, [HRBP](#) 0750, and 21 Apr-29 May 2007), *French Frigate* (20-23 May 1986, *E* 46:156; 4-15 Aug 1986, *E* 47:29; and 27 Dec 1997-2 Jan 1998, found dead on the latter date but specimen apparently not saved), and *Necker* (23-27 Dec 1997).

The number of Laughing Gulls recorded from the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* is difficult to estimate as individuals likely make inter-island passages, although many records are of birds wintering in the same location for several months or more. The first record was of one found on the Honolulu Christmas Count 26 Dec 1966 (*E* 27:70, 73), surprisingly late given numerous prior records from the c. Pacific, S and W of Hawaii (Clapp and Sibley 1967, Sibley and McFarlane 1968). Subsequently there have been a [minimum](#) of 178 individuals recorded, on *Kaua'i* (32, 1979-2008; e.g., BPBM 178484; [HRBP](#) 0126-0127, 1255-1256, 5023, 5829), *O'ahu* (59, 1968-2009; e.g., BPBM 156955, USNM 561050; [HRBP](#) 0416, 1091-1093, 5230, 5425, 5729), *Moloka'i* (11, 1978-2009; e.g., [HRBP](#) 5266, 5734), *Maui* (37, 1976-2006; e.g., [HRBP](#) 5023), and *Hawai'i* (39, 1983-2009; e.g., [HRBP](#) 0324, 0329-0330, 0501, 5189, 5228, 5426, 5728, 5785, published *AB* 41:149). One was also observed at sea 63 km ESE of Hawai'i I 23 Nov 2002 (Rowlett 2002). Examination of records suggests that they increased in the Hawaiian Islands during 1966-2009; e.g., there are records for a [minimum](#) of 2 birds in the 1960s, 14 in the 1970s, 40 in the 1980s, 51 in the 1990s, and 74 in the 2000s. Four or more together have been observed on 8 occasions on Kaua'i, O'ahu, and Maui, including a high count of 6 near Kahuku, O'ahu, in Jan-Feb 2002. Many wintering individuals remain through April or May, and probable or confirmed over-summering birds, in many cases first-cycle individuals, have occurred on Kaua'i, O'ahu, and Maui in 1980, 1982, 1985, 1998 (2

birds), 2000, and 2007 (2 birds). One was also reportedly collected on O'ahu 26 Jul 1968 (Berger 1972, 1981) but the specimen location is unknown to us. The only record for a spring adult was of one photographed at Kawaihae, Hawai'i 3 Jun 1983 ([HRBP 0324](#)). In fall, most individuals have been initially detected in Nov, with a few records for Aug-Oct, the earliest being near Kahuku, O'ahu 6 Aug 2007.

The first record for a Laughing Gull from Kaua'i, involved a bird picked up in Ahukini 14 Dec 1979 and turned into a collection facility as part of the "Save Our Shearwater" program (see [Newell Shearwater](#)), where it died (BPBM 157401). This individual had been banded as a chick at Barnegat Light, New Jersey, 17 July 1979, and had thus made an 8,000-km, east-to-west trip in less than five months time (Telfer and Shisler 1981). This and other specimens from Hawaii measure out to be the larger n. breeding *L.a. megalopterus* as opposed to nominate *atricilla* which breeds in the West Indies (Pyle 2008).

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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