

FEATURED PHOTO

PEREGRINE FALCONS ATTACK A ROSS'S GULL IN CENTRAL COASTAL CALIFORNIA

PETE SOLE, 3660 Crestline Way, Soquel, California; pete@lighthouse.net

On 12 January 2017, Don Pendleton discovered a Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*) near Pillar Point Harbor, Half Moon Bay, San Mateo County, California. He contacted Donna Pomeroy, who joined him to help confirm the identification. They noted key identification points including the gull's rather small size, pink blush on the breast and belly, dark spot behind the ear, small black bill, and red legs. One of Pomeroy's photos is featured on this issue's back cover. Over the next 3 days, hundreds of birders watched and photographed the Ross's Gull. The gull often foraged alone in parking lots, open fields, and along California Highway 1. All reports were within a 3.5-km radius of the Half Moon Bay Airport (www.eBird.org).

On 14 January 2017, at 13:51 PT, I arrived to see and photograph the Ross's Gull at a partially flooded field of Brussels sprouts next to the Half Moon Bay Airport. Under clear skies, the gull foraged alone on the ground, brilliant white and pale gray against the dark green and brown field. During the next 9 minutes, over 20 birders and I watched and photographed the gull, which was approximately 35 meters from California Highway 1. At 14:02, the gull made a short flight, and returned to the field. When it flew a second time, two adult Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) attacked it. Repeatedly the falcons took turns diving at the gull from alternating sides. The gull made evasive aerial movements, until one of the falcons caught it midair, approximately 10 m above the ground. I photographed one of the falcons carrying the Ross's Gull in the air (14:04), but quickly lost sight of it as it flew west into the sun (see photo on this issue's back cover).

This is the second record of a Ross's Gull in California, accepted by the California Bird Records Committee (www.californiabirds.org/cbrc_book/update.pdf). It follows one at Red Hill along the south shore of the Salton Sea, Imperial County, 17–19 November 2006 (McCaskie 2007). The winter range of Ross's Gull is poorly known (Blomqvist and Elander 1981). Maftai et al. (2015), however, tracked three Ross's Gulls wintering in the Labrador Sea. The Ross's Gull in Half Moon Bay was over 4000 km from the Labrador Sea and other suspected winter grounds.

Pairs of the Peregrine Falcon are known to prey cooperatively on a range of bird species, including doves and small gulls (White et al. 2002). Peregrines' prey range in weight from about 20 grams to 1 kg (Paine et al. 1990). Ross's Gulls weigh 180 grams on average (Sibley 2000). The Peregrine's cooperative hunts usually take place within 16 km of an eyrie (Ratcliffe 1993). The Ross's Gull at Half Moon Bay foraged within 10 km of a known Peregrine nest (G. Stewart pers. comm.). In Siberia, Potapov (1990) reported finding Ross's Gull feathers in regurgitated Peregrine Falcon pellets. The cooperative nature of this attack, and its proximity to a local eyrie, suggests that it was by the local Peregrine pair. This is the first documented Peregrine Falcon attack on an adult Ross's Gull in North America.

I'm grateful to Don Pendleton and Donna Pomeroy for graciously sharing their personal experiences and photos and reviewing early drafts. Alvaro Jaramillo provided feedback, guidance, and additional sources for research. Nancy Collins reviewed and edited multiple versions of this note. Bruce Lyon and Glenn Stewart kindly provided information on Peregrine Falcons in the San Mateo and Santa Cruz areas, and gave feedback on drafts. Todd Newberry, reviewed drafts in person with me, and provided great guidance for publication. Mark Mallory, Sven Blomqvist, and John Sterling reviewed the manuscript and provided especially relevant references. Gary Graves originally asked me to write this report. Were it not for his incredibly generous guid-

FEATURED PHOTO

ance, persistence, reviews, sources of information, and encouragement, this note would never have been written.

LITERATURE CITED

- Blomqvist, S. and Elander, M., 1981. Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*), Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*) and Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*)—gulls in the Arctic: A review. *Arctic* 34:122–132; doi 10.14430/arctic2513.
- Maftei, M., Davis, S. E., and Mallory, M. K., 2015. Confirmation of a wintering ground of Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* in the northern Labrador Sea. *Ibis* 157:642–647; doi 10.1111/ibi.12261.
- McCaskie, G. 2007. A Ross's Gull reaches southern California. *W. Birds* 38:137–140.
- Paine, R. T., Wootton, J. T., and Boersma, P. D., 1990. Direct and indirect effects of Peregrine Falcon predation on seabird abundance. *Auk* 107:1–9.
- Potapov, E. 1990. Birds and brave men in the arctic north: Polar explorers, the Russo-Japanese war, and the ever mysterious Ross's Gull. *Birds International* 2:73–83.
- Ratcliffe, D. 1993. *The Peregrine Falcon*, 2nd ed. Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Sibley, D. A. 2000. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Knopf, New York.
- White, C. M., Clum, N. J., Cade, T. J., and Hunt, W. G. 2002. Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), in *The Birds of North America* (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.), no. 660. *Birds N. Am.*, Philadelphia; doi 10.2173/bna.660.
-
-

Wing your way to....

WFO 2017 Conference

PUEBLO CONVENTION CENTER, Pueblo, Colorado

16–20 August 2017

Please join us for

- Two afternoons of science presentations
- Bird sound identification challenge with Nathan Pieplow
- Bird photo identification panel with Ed Harper
- Annual banquet and keynote presentation by Lauryn Benedict: "He Sings, She Sings: Female Songbirds in Your Backyard"

WORKSHOPS:

- "Birds from the Inside Out" with Lauryn Benedict
- "How to Make, Analyze, Edit, Share & Publish Recordings of Bird Vocalizations" with Ted Floyd
- "What do Birds Eat?" with David Leatherman
- "Identifying Birds by Their Sounds" with Nathan Pieplow
- "The Ins and Outs of eBird: the basics to advanced use and application of eBird" with Scott Somershoe
- "Identification of Shorebirds" with Jon Dunn

FIELD TRIPS & MORE:

For more details please visit www.westernfieldornithologists.org/conference.php and click on "Schedule and Full Details."

See you in Pueblo!



“Featured Photos” by © Donna Pomeroy of El Granada, California (upper), and Pete Sole of Soquel, California (lower): Ross’s Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*) near Pillar Point, San Mateo County, California 12–14 January 2017, representing the second record of the species for California. The Ross’s Gull was attacked by a pair of Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) hunting cooperatively and carried off.