

FIRST BREEDING RECORDS OF SLATY-BACKED GULL (*LARUS SCHISTISAGUS*) FOR NORTH AMERICA

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As a breeding species, the Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*) is limited to the Asiatic coasts of the North Pacific and the Bering Sea, primarily around the Sea of Okhotsk and along the east coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula (American Ornithologists' Union 1983, Harrison 1983). The only previous breeding record in North America, in northwestern Mackenzie, has been seriously questioned (American Ornithologists' Union 1983). In Alaska, the species is a rare spring migrant and summer and fall visitant along the coasts of the Bering and Chukchi seas (Kessel and Gibson 1978). Evidence for breeding in Alaska is limited to a territorial bird at Shaiak Island in northern Bristol Bay on 12 July 1990 (Petersen et al. 1991). We report here the first confirmed breeding records of Slaty-backed Gulls in North America near Cape Romanzof, Alaska.

Cape Romanzof projects into the Bering Sea at the western end of the Askinuk Mountains (61°49'N, 166°5'W) on Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge. Beginning 3 km south-southwest of the cape, Aniktun Island runs south for 5.5 km across the mouth of Kokechik Bay. Aniktun is a low, sandy, barrier island averaging about 400 m in width. In 1996 and 1997, the island supported a Glaucous Gull (*L. hyperboreus*) breeding colony.

On July 3, 1996, BJM and JRM visited Aniktun Island. As they approached the island, they saw a Slaty-backed Gull sitting upon a nesting mound near the eastern shoreline, about 2 km south of the island's north end. The bird's mantle color was near the dark extreme described by Gustafson and Peterjohn (1994). The gull flushed from the nest when BJM approached to within 500 m. As BJM approached, and after he arrived at the nest, the adult circled overhead and gave alarm calls.

The nest mound was 0.25-0.5 m high, and consisted primarily of dead vegetation. The nest was built in an expanse of unvegetated sand, and was located >10 m from the nearest Glaucous Gull nest. The nest bowl contained a single egg, and was very similar in both size and construction to the most well-developed Glaucous Gull nests found elsewhere on the island. BJM photographed both the nest and the adult circling overhead (copies of photographs are on file at the University of Alaska Museum, Fairbanks, Alaska). While censusing the rest of the island, BJM saw both an adult and a third summer Slaty-backed Gull near the south end. Although 138 other gull nests were located on the island (primarily Glaucous Gulls, but also a few Glaucous-winged [*L. glaucescens*] and Glaucous x Glaucous-winged hybrids), no additional Slaty-backed Gull nests were found.

While BJM censused elsewhere on the island, JRM noticed the incubating bird returning to and settling on its nest. Later, JRM observed a second Slaty-backed Gull, as dark-mantled as the first, landing 5-10 m from the incubating bird. Although we could not confirm their relationship, it is likely that the second Slaty-backed Gull was the incubating bird's mate.

On July 3, 1997, CMH, JRM, and an assistant returned to Aniktun Island to census seabirds. We once again found a pair of nesting Slaty-backed Gulls, with a 3-egg clutch. As in 1996, both members of the pair had extremely dark mantles. The nest was 2 m from a Glaucous Gull nest, within a group of about 10 Glaucous Gull nests which comprised the easternmost nesting cluster on the island. The Slaty-backed Gull nests found on Aniktun Island in 1996 and 1997 represent the first confirmed breeding records of the species in North America.

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