

# Yellow-footed Gull (*Larus livens*) Preys on a Black Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma melania*)

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**Abstract.**—I observed a Yellow-footed Gull (*Larus livens*) capture an apparently healthy Black Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma melania*) near a breeding colony of petrels in the Bay of La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico. The petrel was caught after it left the colony, approximately 75 m from shore, when it was forced to the water's surface by the gull, and apparently consumed. This represents the first report of a Yellow-footed Gull killing a storm-petrel, as well as the first record of larid predation on Black Storm-Petrels. It is unusual also, because the petrel was captured at sea, rather than directly on a breeding colony. Received 9 May 1996, accepted 27 May 1996.<sup>1</sup>

**Key words.**—Yellow-footed Gull, *Larus livens*, Black Storm-Petrel, *Oceanodroma melania*, predation.

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Predation on storm-petrels at seabird colonies has been recorded on numerous occasions. However, actual observations of predation are rare. Most records of predation are indirect, usually obtained through analysis of stomach contents, pellets, or remains collected from predators (e.g., gulls, owls and falcons—French 1979, Trapp 1979, Vermeer *et al.* 1988, but see Watanuki 1986, Ryan and Moloney 1991). Predation by diurnal predators is believed to exert selection influencing the development of nocturnal behavior in storm-petrels at colonies, with birds usually approaching and departing from colonies at night (cf. Lockley 1932, Harris 1974, Watanuki 1986). Here I describe an incident of Yellow-footed Gull (*Larus livens*) predation on a Black Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma melania*).

On February 14, 1996, at approximately 0840 h local time, a Black Storm-Petrel was seen leaving Los Islotes, a small pair of islands in the Bay of La Paz (24°35'N, 110°23'W), Baja California Sur, Mexico. This site is a breeding colony of both Black Storm-Petrels and Yellow-footed Gulls. As at other storm-petrel colonies, petrels are rarely seen close to shore in daylight hours at this site (pers. obs.). The storm-petrel was observed at

close range (within 5 m) flying quickly about 2-3 m above the water's surface and away from shore, and was first seen approximately 20 m from shore. Within several seconds, two Yellow-footed Gulls flew out from the island about 3 m above the water's surface, and began chasing the petrel, catching up with it and quickly forcing it to the water's surface when about 75 m from shore. One of the gulls grabbed the petrel in its mouth, almost completely engulfing it. Both gulls then flew back to the islands, landing out of sight behind several large boulders. Although actual ingestion was not observed, I presume that the gull swallowed the storm-petrel.

This observation is of interest for several reasons. First, Yellow-footed Gull predation on storm-petrels does not appear to have previously been reported in the literature, although this species has been recorded capturing and killing other bird species (Dunning 1988, Verlarde 1992). Similarly, predation by any larids on Black Storm-Petrels does not appear to have been previously reported. Secondly, this capture occurred over water and away from a colony, demonstrating that gulls are, at least under some circumstances, able to capture free-flying storm-petrels.

<sup>1</sup>Editor's Note: This manuscript is the first fully digitally submitted, reviewed, revised and accepted for *Colonial Waterbirds*, via the Internet. To a degree, the rapidity of processing and publication reflects this technology and all future authors and referees are encouraged to take note.

According to Harrison (1983) it is not possible to discriminate juvenile from adult Black Storm-Petrels. As the storm-petrel left the island it flew quickly and directly away, suggesting a healthy individual. The possibility remains, however, that this particular individual was a juvenile and not experienced with avoidance of predators and/or that it was not healthy and was, therefore, unable to easily avoid capture by the gulls. Observations of potential avoidance behavior by storm-petrels at sea, when storm-petrels and gulls are in the same vicinity, would help clarify whether such possibilities were factors in this incident.

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