

# B O C A G I A N A

Museu Municipal do Funchal

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## FIRST RECORD OF THE COMMON GULL *LARUS CANUS* IN MADEIRA

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With 1 figure

When Mr. Ingemar Johansson and I arrived in Funchal, Madeira, 26th May 1976, we were informed by Mr. G. E. Maul that there was a strange gull in the harbour. Next morning all three of us, together with Mr. Alec Zino, went to the spot, an outlet of a small stream where the gull in question could be found. This strange gull could not be identified, but we happened to observe another gull, this a Common Gull, *L. canus*, in first nuptial plumage, a species not previously reported from Madeira. There were also a large number of Herring Gulls, *L. argentatus atlantis*, and a few Black-headed Gulls, *L. ridibundus*, in the area and excellent size comparisons could be made when the gulls were walking among the boulders pecking for small particles floating in the stream. These particles probably originated from sewer outlets. The size of the Common Gull was half-way between that of the Black-headed Gulls and the unidentified gull, which in turn was half-way in size between the Common Gull and the Herring Gulls. The unidentified gull had plumage characters similar to a second summer Herring Gull of the nominate race, but had greenish-grey legs and a light, somewhat rose-tinged bill with a broad black subterminal band. I personally suspected that the bird could have been a California Gull, *L. californicus*, but gull experts contacted in the United Kingdom and USA all affirm that from details available the bird cannot be positively identified as this or any other species.

The Common Gull was seen both on the 27th and 28th of May. Its plumage was worn, it had a somewhat streaked head, a light underside, a light-grey back, brownish mottled wing coverts and dark-brown

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wing-quills. The tail had a dark terminal band and the inner part light. The bill was light, with a broad dark tip. These details are those of the Common Gull in first nuptial plumage. The similar looking Ring-billed Gull, *L. delawarensis*, which has been found in the Azores, Bannerman (1969) and Cook (1947), and once in Germany, Berndt & Rahue (1968), is clearly larger and has a stouter head than the bird observed. The Ring-billed Gull also has a more prominent bill. Bill shape is hard to judge from the photograph (Fig. 1.) as the bird here is seen from above, but the small-looking head can be seen clearly. I have personal experience of both the Ring-billed and the Common Gull and the shape of the bill in this case was that of the Common Gull according to my own experience. Mr. Johansson also had earlier experience of the Common Gull and we saw no reason at all to suspect any other species. Mr. P. J. Grant whom we contacted in England also agreed with our identification and commented on the bird of the photograph that «further differences from Ring-billed are the broadly pale-fringed tertials, the mantle generally a shade darker than the coverts (instead of similar in tone), and the clear-cut tail band (rather rather than ill-defined along the trailing and leading edges)». As the Common Gull normally winters relatively close to Madeira, it is more likely to occur in Madeiran waters than the Ring-billed Gull.

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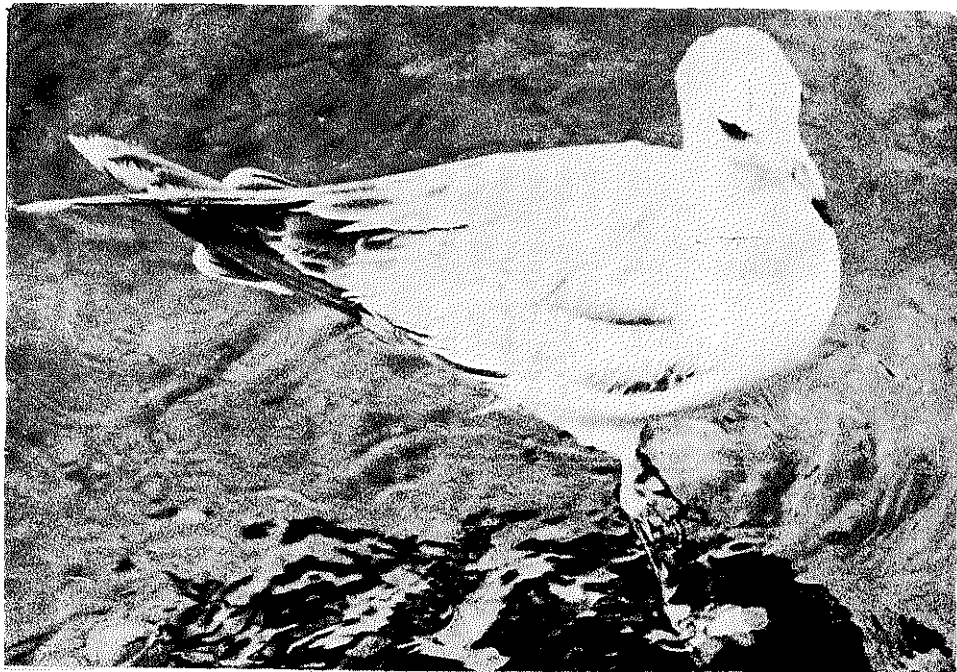


Fig. 1. — Common Gull (*Larus canus*). Bird as seen in Funchal Harbour on 26th May 1976.