

Laridae

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GULLS - INDIA

8 March, 1983

Meluhaleganam

Yesterday and this morning, I noticed gulls flying along shore. Obviously Larus brunnecephalus. Wing pattern is unmistakable (front white triangle, dark underneath, etc.).

Appearance of species in flight is distinctive. Plump-bodied, pigeon-like. Somewhat reminiscent of Kuroleui's gull (Larus curvirostris in the non-breeding season - but see below). A little less reminiscent of Larus curvirostris (also breeding at high altitudes). L. brunnecephalus ("Brunnei") may be as plump as L. curvirostris, but it is thicker-billed and looks less small-headed.

I start out to walk along beach to Meluhaleganam 1:10 p.m.
Sunny hot. Very windy. Heavy surf. Tide is high.

A few Brunnei fly by (going south into wind) singly or in small groups (from 2 or 3 up to at least 10 inds.) Mostly adults. A few inds. in immature plumage. All or almost all in non-breeding plumage. Perhaps a few with traces of hood.

A single Brunnei, non-breeding plumage, lands on shore. Stands and runs at very edge of waves. Presumably interested in feeding, but it does not actually peck at anything.

1:45 p.m. See group of approximately 25 inds. floating on water, approximately 50 m off shore. Mostly Brunnei. All Brunnei apparently in non-breeding plumage. But group also includes 3 much larger birds with full hoods. Must be L. ichthyophaga ("Ichthy")

Ichthy are more distinctive in appearance than Brunnei. Coloration of yellow bill and dark hood is very peculiar. The birds are flat

ing with similar pattern "drawn in" look almost albin-like! Shape of head is difficult to determine just now in this position. Perhaps it is "full". Or it may show a trace of "mask like" cut-out on nose. But almost certainly not as much as in the "true" marked gulls. The mantle of the Whittys also seem to be slightly darker and browner than that of the Brunnes. At this distance at least, color of head appears to be white. Could be brown-black rather than pure white.

When first seen, all the gulls in this raft are close together. Only 1-3 ft apart in most cases. And the Whittys seem to be more well integrated with Brunnes. 2 Whittys, presumably a pair, is one part of group. The 2nd Whitty is 6-10 ft away in another part of group.

None of the birds is obviously feeding. Although the Whittys dip their bill into water quite frequently. Can't tell if this is for drinking or not.

The injured Whitty disappears without any sound, its departure.

The Brunnes are much more restless than Whittys. Many individuals of Brunne fly up (abrad, into wind) for about 100 yd or so. Even the Brunnes that do not fly seem to swim faster and more vigorously than the Whittys. As a result, the Whittys gradually get left behind as the Brunnes move on. They make no attempt to catch up.

Then I notice what seems to be a 2nd pair of Whittys about 50 m behind the first. Also isolated. One member of the pair seems to have complete head. The other seems to be largely white-headed. The members of each pair tend to stick remarkably close together.

One would suppose that the Whittys, as a whole, are more advanced in the annual cycle than are the Brunnes. By relative frequency of head. And I certainly can see no traces of pairs among the Brunnes. Presumably Brunnes start to breed earlier, at their high latitudes, than do the (lowland) Whittys.

Looking ahead to the wedding group of Brunnes, I see that 1 ind. seems to have, or to be acquiring, a head.

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2:03 pm Getting gradually drifting further and further from shore getting difficult to see among the white caps so I go on, 2:10

See a single *Boninus* in non-brooding adult plumage on shore. Definite feeding edge of waves. Food is unrecognizable. Probably sea urchin.

Go on to town of *Melobanidion* in 2:15. Then start back 3:10 pm. Still sunny and windy, but not quite so hot. Tide is going down now. See about *Boninus* in non-brooding plumage feeding edge water on shore. As before.

NOTE: *Boninus* looks more like *BMG* on water or on land than will get. Only bill is slightly thicker.

There found whole group of *Boninus* (ca. 25 inds.) on shore. All white-headed except for one which has nearly complete head. Probably same group seen on water earlier. Mostly just resting. Occasional picking up food at edge water.

Sittings definitely gone.

The *Boninus* on shore fly away short distances when a human being approaches. Often in air & before flight. But there is absolutely no other sign of ritualized behavior. I can't even hear any sort of collective notes. Of course, the sound of the surf is loud, but it also seems possible (or quite likely) that this form is less vocal than the *BMG*, at least during the non-brooding season.

I begin to examine 3:35 See group of 4 *Boninus* on beach. Feeding near

I start out again in the direction of *Melobanidion* in 3:50 pm. There are groups of *Boninus* flying over the beach along shore line. First one below beach 4:00. I see very large group of *Boninus* 100-200 yds offshore. Group probably at least 100 individuals.

Most of them are in air, others flying about and repeatedly feeding. Know whether latter are *Boninus*? Some birds also rest on

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water from time to time. Almost all birds are white-headed.

There is a big group of birds and a small active group of *Boninensis* that I have seen. It would appear that this species is primarily gregarious during the non-breeding season and presumably littoral. (Both Salim Ali and Ben King state that it also occurs on rivers. But I have never seen it on inland waters around here - not even at the canal.)

I believe many are *B. minor*, but perhaps less littoral, more oceanic? ???

By 10 pm the birds of this group are gradually moving S (again).
Mostly out of sight by 10:30 pm.

COMMENT: It is possible that there were a few terns mixed in with this feeding group of *Boninensis*. There certainly are a variety of terns in the region as a whole. At least 2 species. All red-bellied. But some with light primaries, and others with dark ones. Perhaps a *Sterna s.s.* and a "*Thalasseus*"? But the terns certainly do not associate closely with the gulls.

And it is interesting that I have never seen a real *n. subultramarinus* anywhere around here!!!

9 March, 1980

Malakalapuram

Another sunny, windy day. From hotel, at noon, I see *Boninensis* flying along shore south into wind as usual.

Starting out around 1:40 pm. A. S. J. J. J. J. J.

Single *Boninensis* still flying by.

Also flying from surface of water near shore.

2:13 pm. Usual place, halfway to Malakalapuram. Find 2 adult *Boninensis* in non-breeding plumage on shore. Behaving as usual. Then one adult *Boninensis* (identifiable as female) flies by, birds beside

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one du birds already on beach. This never was seen to have complete head! It starts in extreme dry low HT's. Then arrives about neck but otherwise remains F. I can't tell if this is an intermediate "Nymph" or "Chloris" phase or not. Not sure I have any records (the surf at the beach).

"Pentamer" of headed bird fails to respond. Headed bird walks away in semi-1/2 open bill cluck (presumably "Kump" type note), and is looking forward.

Then I see that there is a big raft of Bonin in water, about 100-150m away. All are almost all white headed. Some groups show to join others. No visible gulls.

Certainly no Del any where.

NOTE: Almost all the Bonin that I have seen along the coast have been adults. Juvs do occur, but they are relatively very rare (1 to 25?).

All the Bonin on the beach fly out to the water. Then back to beach. No gulls on landing. But a few seconds later, one white headed ind. in middle of group does 1 hit movement in adult posture. I think that this ind. is adult!

I start back to Hotel 2:20 pm. Nothing of much interest.

2:35. Find large group of white-headed Bonin on beach right in front of "Golden Lion". Also a couple of inds. with partial heads. Miscellaneous birds flying over head. Noting at least one Gull-billed Tern. Gull-billed terns are very common. In intermediate. Also see 1/2 up at beach with 1/2 by.

Stop observations 2:45 pm.

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