

Philadelphia Larus



the newsletter of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club

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Bonaparte's Gull: A History

by ED FINGERHOOD

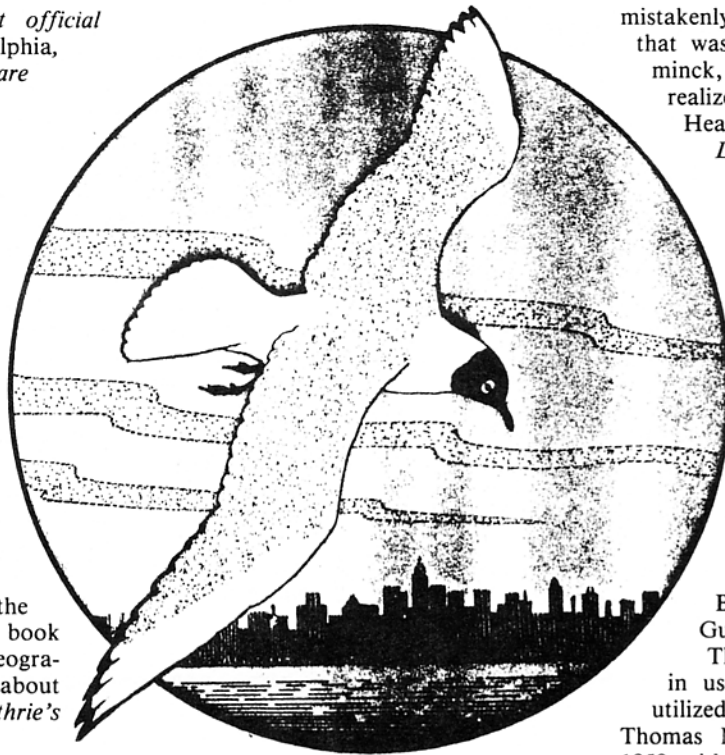
EDITOR'S NOTE: The first official connection of Larus philadelphia, Bonaparte's Gull, with the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club seems to have come with the publication in 1959 of the second edition of the DVOC's "A Field List of the Birds of the Delaware Valley Region." The bird, an adult in breeding plumage, is seen flying with the Philadelphia skyline in the background.

Philadelphian patrician, philologist and naturalist George Ord, a friend of Alexander Wilson's and compiler of his *American Ornithology*, introduced Bonaparte's Gull to science in 1815. Ord's description of the bird was published as a footnote (p. 319) in the second edition of an obscure book dealing with astronomy, world geography, animals, history — just about everything — known today as *Guthrie's Geography*.

In the section "American Zoology," Ord briefly describes a bird he call *Sterna philadelphia*, presumably because he believed its slender bill placed it among the terns — *Sterna* — and because he collected it near his hometown. He does not give the location, but the American Ornithological Union assigns the type to "Philadelphia."

Ord gave the bird the common name "Banded-tail Tern," apparently for the dark trailing edge on the tail feathers of the immature bird. He declared it a "non-descript"; that is, never before described.

We next hear of this bird from Charles Lucien Bonaparte, nephew of the Emperor and Philadelphia area resident from 1823 to 1828. Charles Bonaparte, a friend of Ord's and John James Audubon's, authored *American Ornithology of Birds Not Described by Alexander Wilson* (1828, 1833).



He also authored other important works, including the first comprehensive systematic list of North American birds (1828), earning him to the sobriquet "Father of North American Bird Systematics."

In his book *Synopsis of the Birds of the United States*, Bonaparte describes a certain "*Larus capistratus* Temm., the Brown-Masked Gull" (p. 358). He did not associate this bird with Ord's. He was either unaware of Ord's earlier publication or, more likely, he believed Ord's and his bird to be distinct.

In fact, he was actually describing the gull that was soon to be named for him, but he

mistakenly thought it was the same bird that was once described by C.J. Temminck, an altogether different gull now realized to be the Common Black-Headed Gull, *Larus ridibundus* Linn.

Bonaparte did, however, accurately describe the bird's adult and immature plumages and consider it a gull, *Larus*, rather than a tern.

The next to deal with this gull were William Swainson and John Richardson, who wrote the account, named it "*Larus Bonapartii*" and considered it entirely new to science. Like Bonaparte, Richardson makes no reference whatsoever to Ord, but he does distinguish his bird from Bonaparte's "Brown-Masked Gull."

The term "*Larus Bonapartii*" was in use for some 27 years and was utilized by such ornithological greats as Thomas Nuttall and Audubon. But, in 1858, with the epoch-making *Birds of North America*, by Spencer Baird, John Cassin and George Lawrence, the nomenclature of Bonaparte's Gull changed once more.

Lawrence, who wrote the account, revived Ord's long-forgotten specific name, *philadelphia*, and used a new genus, *Chroicocephalus*, which is now superseded. Lawrence wrote, "The specific name 'bonapartei' [sic] under which this species has been so long known, in my opinion, must give place to that of Ord . . . It [Ord's description] agrees in every particular with specimens of the young of *bonapartei* (pp. 852-853)."

Lawrence's opinion has prevailed. And since he retained the vernacular "Bonaparte's Gull," that is the name that has survived the vicissitudes of nomenclatural meddling since Richardson first proposed it.

PROGRAMS

Meetings are held the first and third Thursdays of the month at the Academy of Natural Sciences, 19th St. and Benjamin Franklin Parkway, unless otherwise indicated.

OCT. 1 — EIRIK A.T. BLOM, chief consultant, National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*: "Gull Identification."

OCT. 15: CLAUDIA WILDS, author of *Birding the National Capital Area*: "Tern Identification."

NOV. 5 — DOUG GROSS, biologist: "Bird Studies in Northern Pennsylvania."

NOV. 19 — Annual Banquet, Cannstatter-Volksfest-Verein, 9130 Academy Rd.

DEC. 3 — JACKIE CATSMERE, biologist with the National Park Service: "Bald Eagles of the Upper Delaware."

DEC. 17 — To be announced.

FIELD TRIPS

Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 3 and 4: DVOC Weekend. Barnegat Light to Cape May. Meet at Barnegat Lighthouse State Park on Saturday morning at 7:30.

Friday and Saturday, Oct. 9 and 10: Pelagic Adventure. Back to Barnegat Light for a trip to sea aboard the 100-foot-long *Miss Barnegat Light*. Boat leaves at 2 a.m. Saturday; boarding will begin at 8:30 Friday night. Bring pad and sleeping bag, as well as waterproof cover for bag if you intend to sleep outside on the upper deck. Food and drink available in the enclosed lounge. Trip returns by 6 p.m. Saturday. Past fall sightings include all three jaegers, South Polar Skua, Red-necked and Red Phalaropes, Northern Fulmar, Wilson's and Leach's Storm-Petrel, Gannet, gulls and terns. Send \$40 to Alan Brady, Box 103, Wycombe, Pa. 18980. Make checks payable to DVOC; include your phone number. Raindate: Oct. 11. To be sure there's still room, call Alan, (215) 598-7856.

Sunday, Oct. 11: Island Beach State Park and Brigantine. Meet at entrance station to Island Beach at 6:45 a.m. For information, contact trip leader Don Jones, (609) 859-0281.

Saturday and Sunday, Jan. 9 and 10: Pocono Weekend. Meet at the Day's Inn in Allentown (formerly Holiday Inn) at the intersection of Routes 309 and 22 on Saturday, at 8 a.m. For information, call Phil Street, 215-647-8324.

Philadelphia Larus

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The Planning Begins for Our 100th

By ARMAS HILL

“On February 3rd, 1890, after one or two informal conferences, there was organized the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club. “The object of the organization was the study of birds — the bird in the field was to be considered quite as much as the bird in the cabinet and neither the field nor the cabinet were to be overlooked. Methods of killing birds as well as protecting them were to come within the scope of the Club's work and the contents of an egg were to be considered as well as the shell from which they were blown. In fact, all phases of bird study were to be covered and any respectable male bird student was eligible to membership no matter whether he handled the subject with the gun, the opera-glass, the slapjack, the pen, the scalpel, the paintbrush or the drill — the camera was later added to the list of legitimate weapons. “The pioneers in the movement were seven. Baily, Morris, and Reed were incipient architects still in juvenal or draughtsman plumage; Rhoads was a Jersey farmer, Voelker a taxidermist, Trotter a brand-new M.D. just established as Professor of Biology at Swarthmore College, and Stone a Jessup student at the Academy of Natural Sciences.”

What you have just read is from the “DVOC Twenty Year Souvenir,” a booklet published by the club on Jan. 6, 1910.

On Feb. 3, 1990, the DVOC will be 100 years old. And, throughout that year, “we the people” of the DVOC will be celebrating our anniversary. The club has changed much, in some ways, since it was founded, while in other ways, things are still much the same.

No longer is the emphasis on the gun or the egg, and no longer is membership just

for “respectable male students” — although the attribute of respectability is, we would agree, one of the things still the same.

A Centennial Committee has been formed within the club, as a planning body for activities and functions to take place in 1990.

We are expecting such activities to include a special lecture, an enhanced annual dinner and an expanded publication of *Cassinia* relating to 100 years of birds in the Delaware Valley and 100 years of birders in the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club.

Peter Harrison, author of *Seabirds of the World* and a resident of England, has agreed to join us in Philadelphia to help us celebrate, probably as a speaker at our lecture, which would be given in spring 1990. At about the same time, a pelagic trip, with Harrison on the boat, would certainly be nice, especially with some nice birds around the boat.

The Centennial Committee has been meeting and planning for a year now. Although so far it has been a core group, with relatively few participants, it has been a very good group, formulating good ideas. But, as chairman of the Centennial Committee, I do envision that our anniversary year should really be a “we the people” endeavor, with all members of the club involved in some way to make it successful and memorable. A 100th anniversary party will happen only once.

So, all members of the DVOC are invited to attend the next meeting of the Centennial Committee, to be held on Thursday, Oct. 8, at 8 p.m., in the first-floor cafeteria of the Academy of Natural Sciences, near the 19th Street entrance.

1990 may seem a long way off. However, what's done this year and next year really will determine the quality of our celebration.

Please feel free to join us and help your club.

You are cordially invited to the DVOC Annual Dinner

Thursday, November 19, 1987

Place: Cannstatter-Volksfest-Verein
9130 Academy Rd.
Philadelphia, Pa.
Cash Bar: 6:30 p.m.
Dinner: 7:30 p.m.

Indicate choice of roast beef or broiled flounder
Academy Road exit off I-95; for information, call Kronschnabel, 215-673-3620

Mail checks to:
Al Kronschnabel
P.O. Box 16263
Philadelphia, Pa. 19114
Cost: \$13.50

Checks payable to DVOC

The Log of the DVOC-Urner Pelagic

by KING NEPTUNE BRADY

May 30, 1987. 4:20 a.m., from the deck of the *Miss Barnegat Light*.

Glimpse of Greater Shearwater in beam of running lights. Pass three scallop boats 55 miles out. Capt. Larson heading for scalloper 13 miles farther. Still dark, but able to make out birders at rail. Meritt has early Sooty Shearwater, Murphys have Greater, Dunne has Wilson's Storm-Petrel. Glow in east shows clouds of shearwaters. Two Leach's Storm-Petrel come out of the crowd and slip away before everyone is on them.

Skua appearance creates instant pandemonium — even Manners gets up. Discussion ensues if Great Skua or South Polar Skua. Still too dark for photos. Doug Gill goes Great, Allen Keith not sure, Burgiel settles for Skua sp.

5:00 a.m., light. Hundreds of Greater and Sooty Shearwaters. Pomarine Jaeger floats overhead, then a pair. Later light and dark phases together. Many jaegers, all before 8:00 a.m., all close.

Different skua appears, light head, obvious South Polar, two more South Polar skuas together, one with golden mantle. Several skuas coming at boat from different directions. Picture time! Close Manx Shearwaters brings out Windfelder smile. Five hundred assorted shearwaters around boat.

8:00 a.m. Raggedy, dark skua comes off water into hazy sun. Another skua, but in poor plumage. First indications from photos taken show this definitely is not a South Polar Skua, possibly a Great Skua or Antarctic Skua, either one of which would be way out of place. Time for this stage of molt is completely wrong for Great Skua; experts currently being consulted.

Landbirds fly about: Eastern Kingbird, Chimney Swift, Purple Blackpoll, Magnolia, Yellow, Chestnut-sided and Cape May warblers. Swainson's Thrush arises from water to land aboard at 68 miles east of Barnegat Light. Head toward shore. Pick up Cory's Shearwater in 58° water.

10:00 a.m. Whale blows on horizon, boat races ahead. Incredible

sight of more than 100 large whales surrounding us.

Ocean erupting whales! Finbacks surfacing only yards from boat, spraying birders with blows. Menkes floating, clearly visible, gliding under boat. Resting Humpbacks show flippers, school of White-sided and Atlantic dolphins leap skyward.

Tom Dick, whose license plate reads "NOAH," is understandably ecstatic. Many others who had hoped for a glimpse of just *one* whale are incredulous.

Another South Polar Skua tries to extract a sand eel from a Greater Black-backed Gull. Sand eel explosion probable attraction for whales.

Tannery's thumbs-up grin indicates first-class trip.

No significant birds seen from 53 miles to shore.

Sincere thanks to great group who participated in best trip ever.

Totals:

Wilson's Storm-Petrel 350

Leach's Storm-Petrel 2

Cory's Shearwater 4

Sooty Shearwater 1,000

Greater Shearwater 4,000

Manx Shearwater 3

Pomarine Jaeger 15

South Polar Skua 7

Unidentified Skua sp. 1

Gannet 1

Common Loon 3

D.C. Cormorant 1

Mammals:

Menke 50

Humpback 5

Finback 50

White-sided and Common Dolphins 50



Just another South Polar Skua.

Photo by Alan Brady

LOCAL NOTES

FILL THEM BAGGIES: This November, when only a few Red-tails and a lone Gos are still passing the ridges and it's cold and drizzling and foggy and you decide to visit some favorite little Pennsylvania lake looking for a grounded oddity or two, remember . . . Pennsylvania's 1987 waterfowl season bag limits will hold your take of scoter, eider and Oldsquaw to seven daily. Who even *sees* seven of them a day in this state?

If anyone's seen enough of these species in PA to be so casual about them, it'd be **Barb** and **Frank Haas**. They've been busy with their new publication, *Pennsylvania Birds*, a good start at a long-overdue compendium of Pennsylvania sightings. Good work, guys. By the way, especially since they are not receiving any outside funding, they really do need the support of individuals.

LOOSE CHANGE: First they changed the name, now they're going to charge you for it! Brigantine, aka Forsythe NWR, has begun charging admission to the dikes, on a volunteer basis, as of mid-September. . . . **Armas Hill** returned from his latest trip to Brazil with wild tales of tails. He tells this great story about visiting a convent and asking permission to sneak a peek at a Swallow-tailed Nightjar. If you'd been the nuns, would you have believed him?

STOP THE PRESSES!! **Alan Brady** reports a lengthy waiting list for the Oct. 10 pelagic trip. This looks like the last of the \$40 pelagics. Another bargain bites the dust.

Don Jones has accepted the thankless job of field trip chairman. Well, it's not *all* thankless: Thanks to **Frank Windfelder**, who held down the post for the last few years. Frank tried to initiate a new hawk-watching trip to Raccoon Ridge this year, but no one would lead it. At the moment, neither that nor the traditional first-weekend-in-November Bake Oven Knob trip is scheduled. But I suppose that won't stop people from showing up at Bake Oven any more than a scheduled field trip makes 'em come.

BON VOYAGE, "A" TEAM! The "A" Team, led by intrepid traveler **Phil Street**, will be leaving in November for a spectacular

trip to Australia. Not everyone can afford such a trip, but that's the way the kookaburra crumbles.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING: **Dawn Coughlan** has accepted the position as managing editor of *Cassinia*, according to **Ed Fingerhood**, editor. Dawn also recently began working as assistant to **Frank Gill** in the Academy of Natural Sciences' Ornithology Department. . . . Ed reminds us that the deadline for the next *Cassinia* is Dec. 31. Send material to him at 541 W. Sedgwick St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19119.

Lots more Academy news: Frank Gill, of course, is busy preparing for next year's centennial meeting in the Philadelphia area of the Wilson Ornithological Society. He just returned from another successful trip to Ecuador with Ornithology Department staffers **Mark Robbins**, **Bob Ridgely** and new VIREO head **Doug Wexler**, among others. Mark says the trip, a "benign" one by previous standards, was "perhaps the best in terms of quality and quantity." They came back with 400 specimens, including first tape recordings, tissue samples and skeletons of some species. Among the more spectacular? Mark mentions the Long-wattled Umbrella Bird, the White Cotinga and the Great Green Macaw. Doug Wexler has gotten VIREO some nifty photos, Mark says, using the Dunning technique of having the birds free-flying in an enclosure.

VIREO's **Rob Cardillo** has left the staff and **Geoff LeBaron** will be leaving soon. **Dan Brauning** has completed the fourth of five years of field work on the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas.

It is with sorrow we report the death of DVOC members **Evie Kramer** in the spring and **Howard Spendelow** on Sept. 9. Evie was one of birding's most enthusiastic participants. Howard, a frequent traveler with his wife, **Ruth**, was among the ecstatic sufferers who went to Attu this spring.

We also welcome new club members **George Ovitt** of Philadelphia; **Lynn Kaufman**, late of Devon, now of the wilds of Arizona; **Patricia McKeown** of Philadelphia; **Joe Palumbo** of Medford, N.J.; and returning member **Fred Lesser** of Pine Beach, N.J.

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