



## *Request for records of nominate cachinnans, 'Caspian Gull'*

The BBRC is aware that this form is being reported with increasing frequency in Britain, though as yet it has not been formally admitted to the British List. This would require a record or records to be accepted by both the BBRC and the BOURC. We are aware that various individual gulls have been well documented (e.g. Garner *et al.* 1997; *Brit. Birds* 90: 25-62, 369-383), and some have now been formally submitted. The acceptance of some of these may be expected to follow shortly.

The form appears to be rare but regular in small numbers, especially in East Anglia and the Midlands, but its true status is clouded by a lack of thoroughly documented and reviewed records. While it may be overlooked, it is also true that its abundance could be exaggerated by optimistic claims. We are also aware that the identification of the form can be more complex and difficult to prove than some recent articles have implied. For example, hybridisation with Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* has been reported in Germany.

The BBRC would like to receive details of well-documented sightings from before 1st January 2000 to achieve inclusion on the British List and to establish a baseline of accepted records. The following guidelines are intended to encourage observers to make the high-quality submissions needed to prove the identification of this form:

**General** Birds should have been well seen and watched over long periods, preferably by experienced observers who are regular

gull-watchers, familiar with their local 'large white-headed gulls' and with 'Western Yellow-legged Gull' *Larus cachinnans michabellis* and 'Northern Herring Gull' *L. argentatus argentatus*. Subtle elements of size and structure are important features, as with other large gulls, and these are best appreciated by those fully familiar with variation of the commoner species. Even for experienced observers, these features may be difficult to document adequately on paper, though they may nonetheless produce a distinctive 'feel' to the bird. For this reason, it would be preferable for good-quality photographs or video footage to accompany submissions.

The exact stage of moult should be noted.

Records of birds at reservoir roosts are unlikely to be accepted, as the full range of structural and bare-parts features is rarely apparent under such circumstances. These are subtle characteristics, which need to be observed at close range if possible.

**Adults** It must be clear that the bird is fully adult (primary patterns of subadults are not diagnostic). The precise pattern of the primaries needs to be clearly established, including that of the underside of p10. This may be difficult to observe, even on bathing and preening birds, but can be captured on film or video.

When comparing mantle colour with other taxa, be aware of the effects of strong light and the angle of the birds in relation to the light source and the observer. For a fuller discussion

of general problems of large-gull identification, see Garner *et al.* (1997). Bill, leg, eye and, ideally, eye-ring colours (the last of these is usually very hard to see) should be established, and the extent and nature of any head or neck streaking should be accurately described.

If the bird is observed 'long-calling', the posture adopted should be noted (this can also give a chance to observe the elusive p10 pattern). The call itself should be described or recorded.

**Juveniles and first-winters** As well as vital structural features, it is important to note: the colour of the head and body, including the precise pattern and distribution of any streaking or barring; the pattern of the scapulars (note any second-generation feathers), coverts (paying particular attention to the greater coverts) and tertials; and the patterns of the underwing and upperwing, rump and tail.

**Immatures** Other ages, from first-summer through to subadults, are the most problematic. The diagnostic plumage features shown by adults (notably the precise primary pattern) and juveniles/first-winters can not be used. Identification must be based largely on less-reliable features. Structural features are critical and, in order to judge these correctly, photographs or video footage would be almost essential (though an exceptionally good set of notes could suffice).

Only 'classic' birds are likely to be accepted.