

# First confirmed records of Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* and Dunlin *Calidris alpina* for Colombia

## *Primeros registros confirmados de Larus dominicanus y Calidris alpina para Colombia*

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### Abstract

We present details and photographs of the first Colombian record of Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* and the first confirmed record in Colombia of Dunlin *Calidris alpina*. Both were recorded on 25 January 2013 at Los Camerones, Guajira.

**Key words.** New record, Kelp Gull, Dunlin, *Larus dominicanus*, *Calidris alpina*, photograph, Colombia.

### Resumen

Se presentan detalles y fotos del primer registro en Colombia de *Larus dominicanus* y el primer registro confirmado en Colombia de *Calidris alpina*. Ambas especies, fueron registradas el 25 de enero del 2013 en Los Camarones, Guajira.

**Palabras claves.** Nuevo registro, *Larus dominicanus*, *Calidris alpina*, fotografía, Colombia.

### Introduction

Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* is a southern hemisphere species recorded to date in various South American countries including Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador and Uruguay with records north to Panama, El Salvador, Mexico, the USA and Trinidad & Tobago (BirdLife International 2013). With a natural range to the South of Colombia but vagrants recorded north of Colombia, it would be surprising were the species never to have occurred in Colombia and the lack of records to date is an anomaly. For this reason, various authors have referred to the species as a likely vagrant (e.g. Salaman *et al.* 2001, McMullan *et al.* 2010). Nonetheless, there have been no previous published records in the country to our knowledge.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* is a familiar wader to northern hemisphere birders being abundant in both North America and Europe on tidal mudflats and inshore lagoons that regularly winters (Aug to May) to Costa Rica. In South America, the species is known from a specimen collected in French Guiana in 1926 (Greenwood 1983) and multiple sight records in Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, French Guyana, Venezuela and Paraguay (Lesterhuis & Clay 2003). Among these was a bird observed at Isla Bocagrande, 10 km W of Tumaco, Nariño on 12 September 1994 by Salaman (1995).

The species is included on the Colombian list on the basis of this record but considered to be known only from sight records (Donegan *et al.* 2010).

### Records

On 25 March 2013, the authors visited Los Camerones as part of a Field Guides Inc bird tour. This locality, in the Guajira peninsula, has recently resulted in multiple new "firsts" for Colombia, such as Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. argentatus* (Salaman *et al.* 2008) and Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* (Rowland & Master 2012).



**Fig. 1:** Kelp Gull (foreground) with outstretched wings, together with a 2nd cycle American Herring Gull *Larus argentatus smithsonianus* (background) (J. Fagan).

### Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*

A third cycle or adult Kelp Gull in breeding plumage [was observed for 45 minutes and a series of photographs were taken. The bird was suspected to be a Kelp Gull in the field owing to the authors' experience with the species along the Pacific coast of South America. Fagan lives in Lima, Peru, where this species is a common resident along the coast. Identification was later confirmed that evening with available field guides and online references (Figs. 1-3). It

associated with two other gull species Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* and Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*, which themselves were only recently confirmed for Colombia (Ruiz-Guerra *et al.* 2007, Salaman *et al.* 2008).



**Fig. 2.** Kelp Gull (left) together with a Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus* (centre) and the same American Herring Gull *Larus argentatus smithsonianus* (right) as in Fig. 1 and close-up of the same photograph (J. Fagan).

Identification of this individual as a Kelp Gull was possible on account of its dark back, which excludes all Colombian Gulls except Great Black-backed Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull; and from the latter species by its rather long and pale yellowish legs (Figs. 1-3), proportionally large bill (Fig. 2), light underwing coverts (Fig. 1) and mantle shade (Fig. 1-3). Direct comparison in the field was possible with a third winter Lesser Black-backed Gull (Fig. 3), which (being in its winter plumage) was a scruffier bird with less intense black on the wings and mantle, greyish head markings, shorter, brighter yellow legs and more extensive white patches on the folded wing.

**Dunlin *Calidris alpina***

A winter-plumaged Dunlin was observed for 30 minutes and a series of photographs were taken. The bird was immediately identified in the field as the authors have

numerous years of field experience with this species in various parts of the world. It associated with Semipalmated Sandpipers *Calidris pusilla* and Western Sandpipers *C. mauri* in shallow mudflats of the lagoon where it was observed foraging for food and in flight.

Identification of this species was clinched on account of its droopy, relatively long bill, diffuse breast band and larger size. The authors ruled out basic-plumaged Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* primarily by the lack of white rump and uppertail coverts in flight (see Fig. 7). Curlew Sandpiper would also be a very rare vagrant to South America (and first record for Colombia). White-rumped Sandpiper is also a possible confusion species but this individual's distinctly downcurved bill, in-flight views and photography (Fig. 7) showed only the sides of the rump and vent to be marked white, typical of Dunlin.



**Fig. 3.** Kelp Gull (right, foreground) with a Neotropical Cormorant *Phalacrocorax brasilianus* behind it (right, background), Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus* (centre) and Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* (left) and a Snowy Egret *Egretta thula* (centre, front) and close-up of the same photograph (J. Fagan).



**Fig. 4.** Dunlin at Los Camerones (J. Fagan).



**Fig. 5.** Dunlin (foreground) with Semipalmated Sandpiper *C. pusilla* (J. Fagan).



**Fig. 6.** Dunlin (furthest right) with three Western Sandpipers *C. mauri* (J. Fagan).



**Fig. 7.** Dunlin (bottom) in flight with *C. pusilla* (J. Fagan).

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