

# FIRST RECORD OF FRANKLIN'S GULL *LEUCOPHAEUS PIPIXCAN* FOR SEYCHELLES

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## ABSTRACT

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Franklin's Gulls *Leucophaeus pipixcan* breed in north-central North America, migrating to waters off western South America to spend the boreal winter. On 7 May 2017, a Franklin's Gull was recorded on D'Arros Island, the Republic of Seychelles. This is the first record of this species in Seychelles and the second for the Indian Ocean.

**Key words:** Franklin's Gull, First Record, Seychelles

A single Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan* in adult breeding plumage was observed on D'Arros Island, part of the Amirantes Archipelago of Seychelles, on 7 May 2017. The breeding range of Franklin's Gulls stretches across northwestern United States and central Canada. Boreal winter migrations may only take the birds as far south as south-central US, but most birds overwinter in waters off the west coast of South America (Howell & Dunn 2007, Burger & Gochfeld 2009). This is the first record of this species in Seychelles and the first record of this species in breeding plumage in the Indian Ocean (Burger & Gochfeld 2009, Skerrett *et al.* 2017).

While walking past the floating dock on D'Arros Island (5.4180°S, 53.2962°E) at about 16h00 on 7 May 2017, I observed a gull swimming along the edge of the dock. The dark head of the gull was observable at 30 m but the bird took off when approached within 25 m, preventing a closer view. Fifteen minutes later, the bird was standing on the dock (Fig. 1). Distinguishing this gull from the vagrant Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*, also sighted in Seychelles, was the black hood that extended over the crown of the bird's head. Appearing healthy and alert, the bird took flight when again approached, this time when I was within

15 m (Fig. 2). The diagnostic white band and tips of the wings were unmistakable in flight. The bird did not call. At dusk, the bird was seen again swimming along the edge of the dock, then circling a boat on a mooring 200 m from shore. On 8 May 2017, the bird was seen pecking the dock along its waterline, but what food it was obtaining was not determined. The bird was not seen thereafter on D'Arros or reported elsewhere in Seychelles.

Franklin's Gulls migrate in greatest numbers to the coasts of Peru and Chile, returning to the Nearctic prairies of central Canada and the northwestern United States in late April and early May (Howell & Dunn 2007, Burger & Gochfeld 2009). Nonetheless, vagrant individuals and small flocks have been reported from Iceland (Cramp 1983) to Antarctica (Maftei 2013). Individual Franklin's Gulls have been recorded on small and remote islands in the Caribbean (Guadeloupe and St Barthélemy; Feldmann *et al.* 1999), the Atlantic (Azores, Madeira and Canary Islands; Burger *et al.* 2017), and the Pacific (Caroline Island (Pyle & Engbring 1987); on Line Island (Burger & Gochfeld 2009); and in the Hawaiian Islands, including French Frigate Shoals (Berger 1972). This gull is also known as a vagrant to Australia, with at least 20 records



**Fig. 1.** Franklin's Gull in breeding plumage, D'Arros Island, 7 May 2017. The full dark hood extending to the hind neck, arcing white eye crescents, and conspicuous white wing tips are diagnostic of this species.



**Fig. 2.** Franklin's Gull flying over waters off D'Arros Island, 7 May 2017. A sickle-shaped black band interrupts the white trailing edge of the inner wing, making the white tips notable.

(Menkhorst *et al.* 2107). Only one previous record exists for the Indian Ocean—a winter-plumage Franklin's Gull was recorded at Marion Island in the sub-Antarctic Indian Ocean in 1979 (Sinclair 1981), nearly 4 850 km from the gull reported here. The next closest records of Franklin's Gull in the Indian Ocean come from mainland Africa—in 1972, a Franklin's Gull was recorded from Beira, Mozambique, 2 554 km from D'Arros Island (Hockey *et al.* 2005).

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