FIRST RECORD OF LESSER FRIGATEBIRD *FREGATA ARIEL* FROM RAPA NUI (EASTER ISLAND)

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The Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel* is widespread in the western and central tropical Pacific, where it breeds from Raine Island, Australia, in the west to the Tuamotu Archipelago in the east (Marchant & Higgins, 1990). The non-breeding range is larger, extending northwest to Japan and rarely Russia (Sibley & Clapp, 1967) and northeast, rarely, to the northwest Hawaiian Islands, USA (Pratt et al., 1987), and exceptionally as a vagrant to the continental United States (Howell et al., 2014).

Rapa Nui (Easter Island) is a small island (166 km^2) in the southeast Pacific (27°07′S, 109°21′W) consisting of the main island and several smaller islets. It represents the southeastern corner of the Polynesian Triangle but is a special territory of Chile, which annexed the island in 1888. A total of 25 species of seabirds have been recorded on Rapa Nui, of which approximately 13 breed regularly (Barros et al., 2015; Flores et al., 2014), mostly on the islets Motu Nui and Motu Iti (27°12′0″S, 109°27′10″W). The only species of frigatebird known from Rapa Nui is the Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor* (Barros et al., 2015; Flores et al., 2014; Jaramillo et al., 2008; Marin & Caceres, 2010; Portflitt-Toro et al., 2020). In Chile, it breeds on Isla Salas y Gómez and the Islas Desventuradas, and it is a non-breeding visitor to Rapa Nui (Marín & González, 2022).

In August 2024, during a stay on Rapa Nui, I visited Motu Nui and Motu Iti to study seabirds. Because of strong westerly and northerly winds that persisted during the entire time of my stay, I was only able to visit the islets twice: once in the late morning (10h00–12h00) and once in the afternoon (17h00–19h00) of 28 August. I made all observations from a small, open fishing boat positioned in the lee of Motu Nui. At 18h55, I observed a single adult female Lesser Frigatebird that approached Motu Nui shortly after sunset (Fig. 1). The bird was obviously smaller and had a lighter build and shorter bill than the Great Frigatebirds that were also present. It was further distinguished from Great Frigatebird and other frigatebird species by the combination of white feathers reaching from the breast to the subhumerals (axillary spur), a clean white collar separating the black hood from the dark back, a black throat forming a distinct dark hood, a black belly, and a pinkish bill (Howell & Zufelt, 2019).

Fig. 1. Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel* recorded off Moto Nui, Rapa Nui, Chile, 28 August 2024. Note the white axillary spur reaching from the breast to the subhumerals; the dark hood, separated from the back by a white collar; the relatively short, pinkish bill; and the light build. Photos: D. M. Dehling

This is the first record of Lesser Frigatebird for Rapa Nui (and also for Chile). It also constitutes the easternmost record in the Pacific, extending the southeastern range limit by about 1,560 km to the east.

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