

First record of Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* for Senegal

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Première mention du Fou à pieds rouges *Sula sula* pour le Sénégal. Le 19 octobre 2016, un Fou à pieds rouges *Sula sula* immature a été photographié à environ 10 milles marins au nord de la presqu'île du Cap-Vert, Dakar (c.14°56'N 17°28'W). Il s'agit de la première donnée pour le Sénégal. Les colonies les plus proches se trouvent sur l'île de l'Ascension, dans l'Atlantique Sud, et sur l'archipel brésilien Fernando de Noronha. L'espèce est occasionnelle aux Îles du Cap-Vert, où elle a été rapportée 11 fois avant juillet 2016 ; en octobre 2016, au moins 17 individus étaient présent à Raso.

On 19 October 2016, a pelagic trip was organised during the 14th Pan-African Ornithological Congress (PAOC14) in Dakar, Senegal. We set off north from Ngor, with the objective to travel out to the start of the continental shelf, c.15 nautical miles offshore, and attempt to locate a trawler. Approximately 45 minutes into the journey BvG noticed a long-winged, pale brown seabird approaching from the east and called 'shearwater'. At that point, we had not seen any *Calonectris* shearwaters and the bird's slim-winged structure and rather lazy flight action on slightly 'pushed forward' wings, seemed to match that genus. The bird continued to approach as we slowed down, and the lack of contrast between brownish upper- and underparts, the slightly slower flight and, at close range, the bill structure, quickly revealed that it was in fact a *Sula* species. Fortunately, it made a few circuits of the boat, during which BvG took several photographs (Figs. 1–2). The sighting was made c.10 nautical miles north of the Cape-Vert Peninsula of Dakar, at c.14°56'N 17°28'W.

We are all very familiar with Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* and no elements of the size, shape, plumage or flight action brought that species to mind. Our collective experience of *Sula* species is more limited and we first thought that it might be a Brown Booby *S. leucogaster*, the only booby previously recorded in Senegal (Borrow & Demey 2011, Dowsett *et al.* 2016). However, several features were inconsistent with that identification, and Red-footed Booby *S. sula* seemed a more likely alternative. Subsequent research and study of the photographs confirmed this to be the case, for the following reasons:

- Uniform pale brown-washed underparts, with no clearly demarcated paler area on the

lower belly or underwings, and lacking strong contrast with the upperparts.

- Pale greater covert tips contrasting with darker remiges (producing an upperwing pattern that accentuated the similarity to a *Calonectris* shearwater).
- Rather small and 'pinched-in' bill, creating a more obvious forehead than *S. leucogaster* (or *S. dactylatra*).
- Narrow-based and proportionately fairly long wings that were held slightly bent, with the carpal joints pushed forward.
- Pinkish feet.

Establishing the precise age of this individual was problematic. Several colour morphs of Red-footed Booby occur and often co-exist (Nelson 2005). The brown coloration was not therefore an indication of immaturity. Furthermore, the species can breed in any month over most of its range (Harrison 1983, Carboneras 1992, Nelson 2005) rendering it impractical to age birds using the calendar-year system. The extent of wear evident in the remiges, the fact that several primaries had been replaced, the bluish facial skin and the rather bright pink feet implied that this individual was not a recently hatched juvenile. However, the striking contrast between the old and replaced remiges hinted that the older feathers were perhaps juvenile. Nelson (1978) states that primary moult begins with about the innermost five, not later than seven months after fledging. If the unreplaced primaries were indeed juvenile feathers, and considering that the bird had renewed at least four primaries, this might suggest it was at least c.6 months old, but probably older. Additionally, the bill was paler than that of a recently fledged juvenile, but not uniformly

pale blue as in an adult. Taking into account the bare-parts coloration, the bird was probably 1–2 years old. However, given the complexity of the issue and lack of comparative information, it is perhaps best treated as ‘immature’. At this age, the brown as opposed to grey general coloration and lack of any white in the wings and tail should indicate that it was a brown-morph individual (van Duivendijk 2011).



The nearest Red-footed Booby breeding colonies are on Ascension Island, and Fernando de Noronha, Brazil (Carboneras 1992), c.2,500 and 2,600 km distant, respectively. Vagrants are known from the Cape Verde archipelago, where there were 11 records prior to July 2016, spanning all months except January, May, September and December (Hazevoet 2014, in prep.). A rumour of breeding on Raso, Cape Verdes, was triggered by a photograph taken on 6 June 2016 and claimed to show four adults and three juveniles. This attracted considerable interest, as it would have constituted the first breeding record in the Western Palearctic. However, the inference that these were locally bred birds appears to be unfounded. Indeed, one of the ‘juveniles’ is a brown-morph adult with a white tail, whilst the other two do not appear to be recently fledged, as both have rather bright pink feet and fairly pale bills, like the Senegal bird, instead of dull feet and dark bills as would be expected in early juvenile plumage. Two white-morph adults photographed on Raso on 29 April 2016 (Ławicki & van den Berg 2016a) did not show any signs of breeding behaviour (V. Hart on www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1143866758993658). Although breeding on Raso was initially published as confirmed, it was subsequently rescinded (Ławicki & van den Berg 2016b,c). Two individuals were

Figures 1–2. Immature Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*, c.10 nautical miles north of the Cape-Vert Peninsula, Dakar, Senegal, 19 October 2016 (Barend van Gemenen)

Fou à pieds rouges *Sula sula* immature, c.10 milles marins au nord de la presqu’île du Cap-Vert, Dakar, Sénégal, 19 octobre 2016 (Barend van Gemenen)

first noted on Raso in summer 2015; by October 2016, there were at least 17 present, although no breeding behaviour had been observed (T. Melo *in litt.* 2017). The growing number of birds on Raso does give grounds for optimism that breeding might eventually occur on the Cape Verde Islands, and that the increase in records from West Africa is likely to continue.

In addition to the booby, our pelagic trip yielded c.1,600 Cape Verde Shearwaters *Calonectris edwardsii*, eight Cory's Shearwaters *C. borealis*, c.25 Sooty Shearwaters *Ardenna grisea*, a Great Shearwater *A. gravis*, c.40 Wilson's Storm-petrels *Oceanites oceanicus*, at least three South Polar Skuas *Stercorarius maccormicki*, >200 Pomarine Skuas *S. pomarinus*, a Long-tailed Skua *S. longicaudatus*, four Sabine's Gulls *Xema sabini* and c.150 Black Terns *Chlidonias niger*. The largest congregations of skuas and shearwaters were in the vicinity of trawlers near the edge of the continental shelf, while the locations where we encountered other species, including the Red-footed Booby, lacked any recognisable focus.

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The pelagic trip was organised through Atlantique Évasion, Plage de Ngor, 14522 Dakar, Senegal; tel.: +221 338 207675; e-mail: contact@atlantic-evasion.com. Their services can be recommended to birders wanting to arrange pelagics from Dakar.

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