

First Breeding Record of the Lesser Black-backed Gull in the Macaronesic Archipelago, North Atlantic; a Large Spread in Its Breeding Range

JUAN MANUEL GRANDE¹ AND CESAR-JAVIER PALACIOS

Department of Applied Biology, Estación Biológica de Doñana (CSIC)
Pabellón del Perú, Avda. M^a Luisa s/n 41013, Seville, Spain

¹Corresponding author, e-mail: jmgrande@ebd.csic.es, manuhola@yahoo.es

Abstract.—We report for the first breeding attempt of the Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) in the Macaronesic Archipelago, in Alegranza Island (north of Lanzarote, Canary Islands). A nest with three eggs was found on June 2001, and at least one fledgling was seen in August with two adults. Additional observations suggest that 5-6 pairs may breed on Alegranza Island and nearby Montaña Clara Island. This is the southernmost breeding record for the species, increasing its known breeding range by 2,000 km. Received 1 May 2002, accepted 2 June 2002.

Key words.—Lesser Black-backed Gull, *Larus fuscus*, breeding range, nesting, Canary Islands.

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The Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) is one of the large gull species of the northwestern Palearctic. The strongholds of the population are in northern Europe, particularly in the British Isles and in northern Russia, as far as the Taymyr peninsula (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). In the last decades the *L. f. fuscus* subspecies (northern Europe and Russia) has suffered a marked decline (even disappearing from some areas), while the *L. f. graelsii* subspecies (western population, mainly in the UK) has increased dramatically in numbers and extended its breeding range to Iceland in the 1920s, and to Portugal and Spain in the 1970s. It is now regularly recorded in North America (Pons and Yésou 1997), but so far has not bred there.

In some islands of the Macaronesic Archipelago (which lies off the northwest coast of Africa), especially the Canary Islands and Azores, the species is a common migrant and wintering species (Paterson 1997). Godman (1872a; 1872b) and Bannerman (1914, 1919), pointed to the possibility that the species could breed in the Canary Islands. However there was no evidence of the presence of the species there in the breeding season until the 1990s (R. Barone and J. M. Moreno, pers. comm.).

Here we present the first breeding record of the species in Canary Islands and therefore in the Macaronesic Archipelago. An adult incubating three eggs was found on

4 June 2001 on Alegranza Island, a small rocky island 12 km north of Lanzarote. The nest was close to a *Euphorbia* sp. shrub in a Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus cachinnans*) colony of about 20 pairs. Only one nest was found, but at least three different adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls were observed in this colony. The nest site was not visited again, but a pair of adults with a fledged chick was observed close to the colony on 18 August (B. Rodríguez, pers. comm.), presumably indicating successfully breeding.

At least other ten adults were regularly seen during June 2001 in two nearby Yellow-legged Gull colonies on the same island. These adults were observed courting and defending territories, although breeding was not confirmed. The actual number breeding on the islands could be up to five pairs. In addition, an adult pair of Lesser Black-backed Gulls was also observed courting and defending a territory in a Yellow-legged gull colony in Montaña Clara, a nearby small island, both in 2000 and 2001 breeding seasons (B. Rodríguez, D. Trujillo and F. Siverio, pers. comm.), but breeding was not confirmed. In June 2001, an intensive census was conducted on the Yellow-legged Gull colony on nearby Famara (500 pairs; north of Lanzarote), but no Lesser Black-backed Gulls were present. There are no known records of the species on the Canary Islands outside

Alegranza Island and Montaña Clara Island during the breeding season, however more intensive searches should be conducted.

The islands are in the northern part of the Canarian Archipelago and the closest breeding colonies of the species are on the Iberian Peninsula, about 2,000 km north. The pairs of the Lesser Black-backed Gulls found in this study were in small to medium colonies of Yellow-legged Gulls, as was the case with the first Lesser Black-backed Gulls pairs found in the Iberian Peninsula (Bermejo *et al.* 1997). The presence of 5-6 potential reproductive pairs and at least one probable successful breeding attempt becomes by far the southernmost breeding site of this species and may be the first signs of a new step in the extension of the species' breeding range.

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