Recent records of the Relict Gull *Larus relictus* in western Nei Mongol autonomous region, China

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The Relict Gull *Larus relictus* was described as a new species from China in 1931, since when there have been few records from anywhere in China (see Duff *et al.*, *Forktail*, this issue).

In the 1980s extensive fieldwork on the avifauna has been carried out in most of western Nei Mongol autonomous region. Some ecological data and a few specimens of the Relict Gull have been obtained, providing useful new information on this threatened species of gull.

The Relict Gull occurs in lakes and other wetland habitats in areas of desert, semi-desert grassland and prairie, at about 1,000–1,400 m altitude. It sometimes associates with Common Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus*, Brown-headed Gulls *L. brunnicephalus*, Great Black-headed Gulls *L. ichthyaetus* or Common Terns *Sterna hirundo*, but is more frequently found in separate flocks. When associated with other gulls it often slightly outnumbered the Brown-headed Gull and was typically very alert, quickly flying off from mixed flocks when disturbed.

The species breeds in western Nei Mongol autonomous region, arriving there in early April. On 29 April 1987 a female was collected at Boerjiang Nur, Ordos, which had well-developed Graafian follicles, suggesting that egg-laying would have been no later than early May. (Relict Gulls have subsequently been found breeding at this locality; see Plate.) The usual food in summer is aquatic invertebrates, small fish and leaves of grasses and sedges.

Plate. Relict Gulls *Larus relictus* at a breeding colony, Boerjiang Nur, Nei Mongol autonomous region, China, 1990.

Table. Measurements of Relict Gull skins in the collection of the Institute of Zoology, Academia Sinica.

Locality	*Date*	*Sex*	*Weight (g)*	*Length (mm)*	*Culmen (mm)*	*Wing (mm)*	*Tarsus (mm)*	*Tail (mm)*
Tanggu	1935 04 09	male	–	–	37.5	345	61	134
Kangbao	1953 06 19	male	–	–	37	345	55	128
Shangdu	1953 07 03	male	–	–	36	340	54	133
Ulansuhai Nur	1987 04 16	male	700	464	38	349	61	131
Dongsheng	1987 04 29	male	560	460	36	370	62.5	135
Tanggu	1935 04 08	female	–	–	34	330	58	121
Kangbao	1953 07 02	female	–	–	34	335	51	120
Shangdu	1953 07 31	female	–	–	37	346	53	117
Dongsheng	1987 04 29	female	540	430	32.4	340	52	120

In the course of the fieldwork four flocks of Relict Gulls totalling 58 individuals were discovered in the breeding season. They apparently begin to move south in early November; on 6 November 1989 a flock of more than 100 was found at Hongjian Nur, Ordos, on the border of Nei Mongol autonomous region and Shaanxi.

In the field the adult Relict Gull in breeding plumage differs from the Brown-headed Gull in its slightly larger size, black head with an obvious half-moon-shaped spot behind the eye, heavier bill with a pronounced gonys and longer tarsus. In flight the silver-grey rather than white upperside of the primaries is distinctive. Our fieldwork has demonstrated some morphological and ecological differences from Brown-headed Gull that confirm the distinctness of Relict Gull.

Examination of the bird skins in the collection of the Institute of Zoology, Academia Sinica, provided some further records of Relict Gulls that had previously been misidentified as Brown-headed Gulls. The measurements of nine skins examined are listed (see Table).

These data indicate that in northern China the Relict Gull occurs at about 101°–120°E and 39°–42°N in the summer and autumn and is not rare in suitable habitats in western Nei Mongol autonomous region. The individuals found in the western part of this area are mainly breeding birds, while the few birds found in the eastern part are passage migrants.

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