

BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee
Unusual Record Report Form

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Species Name: Black-headed Gull	Scientific Name: <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	10 March 2018 from ~1838 until 1845
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	~10 mins
First and last date of occurrence:	10 March 2018
Distance to bird:	Views using scopes from about 25 metres

Site Location
mouth of Buffalo Creek on coastal sandspit, Darwin, Northern Territory. at 12°20'20.0"S, 130°55'13.5"E



Habitat (describe habitat in which the bird was seen):
Coastal sandspit and shoreline on rising tide

Sighting conditions:
Calm seas, little breeze and late afternoon to early evening skies meant viewing conditions were excellent, however fading light made photography conditions difficult. Air temperature was in the low-mid 30s, and very high humidity during a period of several days in which there was no afternoon tropical storm.

To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site?

To our knowledge this is the 10th record of Black-headed Gull in Australia.

Previous records are:

5 x BARC Cases (accepted) from Darwin over the period 1998 to 2010, including case #475 from this site at the mouth of Buffalo Creek on 19 Feb 2006, and submission #703 of a non-breeding (first basic plumage) bird seen from 30 December 2009 to 06 March 2010 with photos available on ebird.



ML24458651 © Peter Kyne Photo by Micha Jackson

1 case from Broome (#131), 1 case from Nhulunbuy, NT (#863) and two from Torres Strait islands in 2010.

Recently, a single adult Black-headed Gull in breeding plumage was reported by other observers (and well photographed) in Darwin city at Stokes Hill Wharf and nearby over several days from 15 to 20 May 2018.

Were other observers present Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification, if so, who? All observers saw the bird and agree with the identification.

How confident are you of your identification? 100%

Please confirm that you are willing for BARC to display your images (fully credited with your name) electronically Yes

Physical Description of Bird

A single individual seen in calm conditions, associating with Silver Gulls (*L. novaehollandiae*). The bird was not noticed immediately on arrival and was not seen in flight. Similarly the bird was not observed leaving the area and was only observed for about 10 minutes or less in total.

The bird showed a similar pale grey wings and mantle colour to the silver gulls present, and was a slightly smaller size with a white leading edge visible on folded wings. The most striking feature was a dark hood of mottled chocolate brown colour extending from the chin to the nape. The bill, legs and feet were a dark reddish colour, and the iris was dark with a narrow white eye ring.

The bird was not seen in flight and was not heard to call.

Please indicate other species with which you think it might be confused and how these were eliminated?

Of the 'dark-headed' gulls seen in Australia, Laughing and Franklin's gulls are seen most often. Compared to the Black-headed Gull, both Laughing and Franklins have a broader white eye ring, and in breeding plumage the dark hood extends from the chin further to the hind-neck.

A less commonly seen dark headed gull is Sabine's Gull which has no contrasting eye ring, a dark iris, and a dark hood in breeding plumage that extends to the hind-neck. Adults show a yellow tip on a dark bill not present on Black-headed Gull.

Brown-headed Gull has not been reported from Australia and is slightly larger than black-headed gull (one unaccepted report #619). The brown-headed gull adult has a pale brown head, lighter than that of black-headed, a pale grey body, and a red bill and legs. A key field mark is the white iris of the brown-headed gull not present in the adult Black-headed Gull.

Was the description written from memory? Written notes taken at the time of the sighting were limited. A photographic record of the encounter was made and extracts are provided below. A short video was collected using a phone camera on one of the spotting scopes.



Figure 1. Black-headed Gull left-side profile - digiscope image (Mel Mitchell)



Figure 2. Black-headed Gull –right side profile (Mel Mitchell)



Figure 3. Black-headed Gull left-side profile (Joy Tansey)



Figure 4. Black-headed Gull left-side profile- digiscope image (Mel Mitchell)

What experience have you had with the species in question?

Chris Doughty has previously seen Black-headed Gull in Asia and Europe on many occasions.

This was a new bird species for all other authors.

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