A4. WESTERN YELLOW-NOSED ALBATROSS
Thalassarche [chlororhynchus] chlororhynchus
L 70–76 cm, WS 188–215 cm, bill 11–12 cm
Figures 138–139, A4.1–A4.9

Identification Summary Atlantic. Very rare off e North America (mainly May–Aug). The smallest mollymawk, with relatively light build and long slender bill. All ages have white underwing with black leading edge. Juvenile bill dark, becoming black with yellow culminicorn stripe in 1–2 years; adult bill black with yellow culminicorn stripe and orange nail. Also known as Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross.

Taxonomy The two taxa of Yellow-nosed Albatross are variably treated as subspecies or species, and differ slightly in bill structure, face pattern, and adult head color.

T. [c.] chlororhynchus (Western, or Atlantic, Yellow-nosed Albatross) breeds and ranges in s Atlantic Ocean, very rare e to Australia. Yellow culminicorn stripe slightly broader and more rounded at forehead, with slightly convex sides; outer edges of naricorn convex; eye patch larger and triangular. Adult has smoky gray head and neck.

T. [c.] carteri (Eastern, or Indian, Yellow-nosed Albatross) breeds and ranges in s Indian Ocean, w to South Africa, rarely e to New Zealand. Yellow culminicorn stripe slightly narrower and more tapered at forehead, with straighter sides; outer edges of naricorn straight; eye patch smaller, less triangular. Adult has gray clouding on head and neck. Also called *T. [c.] bassi* (see Robertson 2002).

Names *Thalassarche* means "ruler of the sea," *chlororhynchos* refers to yellow on the bill.

Status and Distribution Endangered. Breeds (Sep–Apr) and ranges in South Atlantic Ocean, mainly 25–50°S.

Atlantic. Very rare nonbreeding visitor (mainly May–Aug, but records year-round) to inshore waters of e North America. North American records presumably all refer to Western Yellow-nosed (adult or subadult Westerns have been recorded in Texas, Florida, North Carolina, New York, and Maine). Records are spread from Newfoundland s to Florida and in Gulf of Mexico from Florida w to Texas. Records in the Northeast (s to New England) mainly late Mar–late Aug; from mid-Atlantic coast s to Florida, mainly late Nov to mid Apr; and from Florida and Gulf of Mexico, mainly May–Oct. Some records may pertain to individuals returning in subsequent years.

FIELD IDENTIFICATION

Similar Species Great Black-backed Gull and Northern Gannet have been mistaken for albatrosses, especially with birds viewed at a distance or in poor conditions. A real albatross, however, should be unmistakable as such. *Gulls* have steadier, less labored wingbeats in calm or light winds but they can sail and bank in strong winds, although with the wings typically crooked at the carpals (vs. held straighter on an albatross); an albatross has a long head and neck projection, a long bill, dark tail, and longer wings with a longer inner arm. *Gannets* have a more tapered and pointed front end and rear end, broader-based wings usually held slightly crooked, and they glide on slightly arched wings.

The only other mollymawk confirmed to date from the North Atlantic is Black-browed, but other species should be considered if you are lucky enough to see any albatross. Note the distinctive underwing pattern of Western Yellow-nosed, consistent in all ages: white overall with a narrow black leading edge.

Black-browed Albatross stockier overall with relatively shorter and thicker bill, broader wings. All ages have more-extensive black on underwing, and adults have clean white head, orange bill. First-cycle Black-browed can have dusky, black-tipped bill approaching pattern of juvenile Western Yellow-nosed, and both species can have variable dusky hindneck shawl; note all-dark underwings of Black-browed. With birds seen only from above, or on the water, note rounded culmen base (squared on Yellow-nosed) and narrow, dark browline (vs. thicker black triangular eye patch of juvenile Western Yellow-nosed or smaller beady eye of older immatures).

Eastern Yellow-nosed Albatross not always safely distinguished at sea. Note smaller black eye patch

(eye typically looks small and beady, vs. set in a large black triangle on Western Yellow-nosed, but immature Western can show small beady eye much like Eastern); adult has paler gray clouding on head and neck, which often look white overall in bright sun (apparent intensity of gray greatly affected by wear and lighting); given exceptional views of adult or subadult, note shape of yellow culminicorn stripe at base: averages narrower and more pointed on Western, broader and more rounded on Eastern.

Gray-headed Albatross (*T. chrysostoma*) of subantarctic s oceans (unrecorded n hemisphere) much like Black-browed in size (L 79–86 cm, WS 205–230 cm, bill 10–12 cm), shape, and underwing pattern (underwings thus with much more black than Yellow-nosed). Adult has gray head (deeper gray than Yellow-nosed and without strongly contrasting whitish forecrown, smaller and less contrasting black eye patch) and black bill with orange-tipped yellow culminicorn stripe and yellow ramicorn stripe; yellow culminicorn stripe broad and rounded at base (narrower and more tapered on Yellow-nosed), culmen base broadly rounded (squared on Yellow-nosed), and naricorn broad and wedge-shaped (visible at close range).

Shy Albatross (ranging to s Atlantic; see pp. 317–320) larger and bigger billed. Faded first cycle can have white head and dusky hindneck shawl recalling Yellow-nosed, but bill pale grayish with contrasting black tip; underwings whiter overall with narrower black margins and often a black preaxilliary notch.

Northern and Southern Buller's Albatrosses (*T. platei* and *T. bulleri*, respectively) of s Pacific Ocean (unrecorded Atlantic or n hemisphere) slightly larger (L 76–84 cm, WS 198–225 cm, bill 11–13 cm) and less rangy overall. Underwings of all ages have slightly thicker black leading edge than Yellow-nosed, and adult and older immature have bold yellow culminicorn and ramicorn stripes; faded first-cycle Buller's can have white head and gray shawl but bill pale (grayish and creamy) with contrasting black naricorn lines and black subterminal band.

Salvin's Albatross (unrecorded n Atlantic; see pp. 321–324) larger and broader winged with stouter bill; all ages typically have grayish hood; immature bill typically dusky grayish with black tip, soon develops paler culminicorn and ramicorn lines; adult bill pale grayish green with yellowish culmen, black subterminal band.

Habitat and Behavior Favors inshore shelf waters. Several records are from shore or even slightly inland from the coast, with birds found flying around buildings or resting on beaches and sandy islets in coastal sounds, sometimes in association with other birds such as Great Black-backed Gulls. Scavenges readily at fishing boats and sometimes accompanies ships. Flight fairly labored in calm to light winds, deep wingbeats interspersed with short glides; sails and wheels easily in moderate to strong winds.

Description Relatively small and lightly built with a fairly long neck and slender bill; culmen base squared, naricorn reduced to a line.

Adult. Head and neck smoky gray with whitish crown and triangular black eye patch; gray hood distinct in overcast conditions but bleaches paler in bright sunlight. Back and upperwings slaty blackish, the back slightly paler and grayer, the wings darker and browner with white primary shafts; rump and uppertail coverts white, tail slaty blackish (paler and frostier when fresh) with whitish shafts. Underparts white, the underwings with a distinct but fairly narrow black leading edge, narrow dark trailing edge, and dark primaries. **Bill** black with bright yellow culminicorn stripe leading into orange-red nail, narrow yellow mandible gape line; legs and feet pale pinkish, eyes dark.

Juvenile/first cycle. Fledges in Apr–May with white head, blackish eye patch, and variable dusky gray hindneck shawl; rest of plumage adult-like but black leading edge to underwing often messier and perhaps slightly wider. **Bill** dull dark brownish to blackish overall with black tip and dull paler brownish culminicorn stripe visible at closer range. Culminicorn stripe becomes dull pale yellowish in first year.

Second cycle. Not well known. Birds presumed about 18 months of age (in Aug–Oct) can have heavily abraded (i.e., juvenile) outer primaries, white head and neck with beady eye (black eye patch smaller than on juvenile), reduced or no hindneck shawl. **Bill** blackish (or subtly paler slaty on basal half) with pale yellow stripe on basal two-thirds of culmen, reddish-orange tinge to nail.

Older immature. Not well known. May attain gray head by PB3 molt, and bill pattern then resembles adult but with duller and reduced color, probably adult-like by age 4 or 5.

Molt (see Fig 140, p. 312). Adult wing molt mainly May–Sep, away from breeding grounds, when only about half of the primaries are replaced in a given season (Furness 1988). As with other mollymawks, apparently does not molt primaries until PB3 molt (in Jan–Apr, about 20–23 months after fledging), when juvenile outer primaries are replaced, and subsequent primary molts alternate inner and middle primaries in phases.

A4.1. As well as the relatively slim build, note the gray hood, white crown, and "yellow-nosed" bill pattern of this Western Yellow-nosed Albatross. SNGH. Tristan da Cunha, South Atlantic, 26 Mar 2005.

A4.2. Active stage 2 primary molt (see p. 304) of this Western Yellow-nosed Albatross may be fourth pre-basic molt (about 35 months after fledging) given how worn the old inner (juvenile?) primaries appear to be. Messy white and gray-mottled hood and distal dark smudge in yellow culmen stripe also indicate "subadult." SNGH. South Atlantic, 34°S 17°E, 17 Apr 2009.

A4.3. Apparent tone of gray hood on adult Western Yellow-nosed Albatross varies greatly with lighting; hood can be quite washed out in strong sun (cf. A4.5). SNGH. Inaccessible Island, South Atlantic, 10 Apr 2009.

A4.4. Immature Western Yellow-nosed Albatross (about 11 months after fledging), with typical "messy" underwing margins (cf. A4.5). Bill starts to develop traces of yellow, and black eye patch reduced, at times suggesting black beady eye of Eastern Yellow-nosed Albatross. SNGH. South Atlantic, 35°S 12°E, 16 Apr 2009.

A4.6. Immature Western Yellow-nosed Albatross (about 11 months after fledging). Underwing pattern messier than adult; also note whitish head and black bill. SNGH. South Atlantic, 35°S 12°E, 16 Apr 2009.

A4.5. Apparent tone of gray hood on adult Western Yellow-nosed Albatross varies greatly with lighting; hood most distinct in overcast (cf. A4.3); bill often appears black at any distance. SNGH. South Atlantic, 45°S 21°W, 7 Apr 2009.

A4.7. Immature Western Yellow-nosed Albatross, possibly third cycle (about 35 months after fledging) about to start fourth prebasic primary molt (cf. A4.2). Relative to adult, bill duller, hood mottled whitish, and underwing margins messier. SNGH. Gough Island, South Atlantic, 8 Apr 2009.

A4.8. Adult Western Yellow-nosed Albatross. Several North American records have been of adults on shore, often in loose association with other waterbirds. Note distinctive albatross posture and shape, diagnostic head and bill colors. SNGH. Nightingale Island, South Atlantic, 29 Mar 2005.

A4.9. Juvenile Western Yellow-nosed Albatross, within about a month of fledging. Fresh juveniles have variable gray clouding on hindneck and usually a dull pale culmen stripe. SNGH. Nightingale Island, South Atlantic, 29 Mar 2005.