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**Abstract.** On December 1, 2020, one individual of the Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* (Linnaeus, 1758) was observed the Araz river in Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, Azerbaijan (AR). The bird was spotted with the use of modern, high-optical equipment in the left bank plain of the lower part of the Araz reservoir, near the Araz Hydroelectric power station. It has a white head and body, grey back, grey wings tipped solid black, dark spot on face, dark bill in winter (yellow in summer), black foot and legs. In winter, this species acquires a dark grey smudge behind the eye and a grey hind-neck collar. The bill also turns a dusky-olive color. The absence of the hind finger on the paws is the main defining feature and was clearly visible on the photographs, where a small bulge appeared in its place. According to ornithological research, literature and internet data, this gull species was observed for Nakhchivan AR for the first time.

**Keywords:** Nakhchivan AR, vagrant, avifauna, seabird species, Charadriiformes, Laridae, *Rissa tridactyla*

The territory of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, which is an indivisible part of Azerbaijan Republic, is distinguished by its rich biodiversity in the Caucasus ecoregion and is reflected in the richness of the fauna of this region. As the territory of Nakhchivan AR has its own natural landscapes, the avifauna of the region is different in terms of species compared to the Azerbaijan mainland. Increasing anthropogenic factors in the area and other large reservoirs created in recent decades have also had a significant impact on ornithofauna, leading to the settlement of a large number of water birds. It became clear that many species of limnophilous birds have found refuge in the wetlands of Nakhchivan. It was noted that one of the largest wetlands covered with reeds and reeds the Araz Reservoir, located on the migration route of birds and along the river Araz (Atras). The Araz Reservoir has become an ideal habitat for different limnophilous species throughout the year, as it is a border area for them. Some of the waterbird found in the territory of Nakhchivan AR rest and feed here during migration, and some nest or stay throughout the year. The total number of birds in the Araz reservoir was found to be higher during spring (February to April) and autumn (August to December) migrations (Talibov 1999, Mammadov 2006).

The larger water bodies of the Nakhchivan AR are located at about 300 km (Caspian Sea) and 400 km (Black Sea) distance, thus difficult to reach for highly water-dependent bird species, especially if one considers the widely mountainous and dry surrounding. One of the main characteristics of Nakhchivan AR is its landlocked circumstance in the midst of the Caucasian region and therefore an absence of pelagic bird species. Despite these circumstances, on 1 December 2020 a Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) was observed for Nakhchivan AR for the first time.

Bird observation was carried out in different seasons of the year, mainly covering the territories of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic along the river Araz. The research objects-wetlands were divided into certain areas and permanent observation points were created in them. On 1 December 2020, near the Araz Hydroelectric power station a *R. tridactyla* was observed for the first time for Nakhchivan AR. The new species is distinguished from other gull species, and it was spotted with the use of a modern, high-optical equipment near the Araz Hydroelectric power station near the village of Nehram (39°05'23.2"N; 45°24'22.5"E), in Babek district (Figure 1).

The Black-legged Kittiwake was acting together with a flock of Caspian Gulls (*Larus cachinnas* Pallas, 1811) and Armenian Gulls (*L. armenicus* Buturlin, 1934). The bird was observed for about half an hour and photographs were taken (Figure 2). After flying for a while, the bird landed on the dam. It was a medium-sized bird, distinguished from other gull species by its black claws and the absence of white spots on the black tips of its flight feathers. The absence of the hind finger on the paws is the main defining feature and was clearly visible on the photographs, where a small bulge appeared in its place. The bird had a black stripe around his neck, a black stripe at the end of the tail and on the upper wing suggesting an individual in first winter plumage.

**Figure 1.** Map of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic showing one recent record of Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*
First record of *Rissa tridactyla* for Nakhchivan AR, Azerbaijan

According to ornithological literature and internet data, there is no information about this species in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (Partikeev 2004, Mammadov 2010, Talibov 2016). The absence of a hind finger in this *R. tridactyla* bird is a key determinant (del Hoyo et al. 1996) and was clearly seen in photographs where a small bulge was seen at the site of this finger. Thus, this bird observed is a first record for the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

*Rissa tridactyla* is a gull species, belonging to the family Laridae. It was formerly known as *Larus tridactyla* by Linnaeus 1758. The juveniles differ from the adults in having a black ‘W’ band across the length of the wings and whiter secondary and primary feathers behind the black ‘W’, a black hind-neck collar and a black terminal band on the tail (del Hoyo et al. 1996).

One seabird species of recent conservation concern is *R. tridactyla*, which is a widespread but patchily distributed breeder along the Atlantic coasts of western and northern Europe (Harrison 1983), and the Taymyr Peninsula and Severnaya Zemlya (Russia), wintering south to the Sargasso Sea and West Africa; and in the North Pacific (Pearson 1936, BirdLife International 2012). The Black-legged Kittiwake breeds on the subarctic and Arctic coasts and islands of Alaska and in eastern North America in the Canadian High Arctic, the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and Newfoundland (Hatch et al. 1993a,b, Roberts & Hatch 1993, Gill et al. 2002). This species was, however, previously observed in the Azerbaijan mainland with some very historic records and a possible sighting in February 1998 (Partikeev 2004). In recent years it was observed at Lake Hajigaboul in October 2015 (M. Heiss, in litt.) and a total of 11 migrating individuals at Besh Barmag bottleneck during bird migration counts at the Caspian Sea in autumn 2017 and autumn 2018 (https://trektellen.org/site/yeartotals/1533/2019; M. Heiss in litt.). The Black-legged Kittiwake is a regular visitor to the Black Sea coast in Georgia (Abuladze 2012), but so far it was not observed in Armenia (M. Heiss, in litt.). There are reports of this species in the neighboring Turkey (Balmer et al. 2002, Kirwan et al. 2008, ebird 2022; Trakuş 2022) and Iran (Scott 2008, Bengil 2010, Ashoori 2018), suggesting a regular occurrence in the region. With this observation the total bird species was increased to 265 species, belonging to 147 genera, 51 families and 18 orders for the fauna of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. According to the results of ornithological research, the wetland birds of the autonomous republic are still represented by 83 species, 52 genera, 21 families and 11 orders. In the future, the number of species will increase by strengthening protection measures in specially protected natural areas of the autonomous republic, conducting intensive environmental awareness among the population and creating safe conditions necessary for the reproduction of bird species.

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References


