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DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species? Great Black-backed Gull

How Many? 1 2nd winter bird

Location? Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co. (near visitors center)

Habitat? large reservoir

Date? 30 Nov-1 Dec 1986

Time? approximately 4:00-4:15 P.M. on 30 Nov and 3:55-4:08 P.M. on 1 Dec

Observers Name and address: Steve Dinsmore, Ames

Others who saw bird: Paul Martsching

Description of bird: I first noticed the bird because of its larger size and whiter appearance as compared to numerous Herring Gulls. The bird also appeared larger-headed than a Herring Gull. The bill was much heavier than a Herring Gull's bill and was bicolored; pinkish at the base with a dark tip. The head was white and had no obvious streaking or speckling. The rest of the bird's underparts were also white without any speckling. Herring Gulls in 2nd winter plumage should have brown streaking on the head and underparts. On the swimming bird, the light back was heavily speckled with dark brown and blackish spots. Herring Gulls in 2nd winter plumage should show a grayish mantle. In flight, the rump was also white without other markings. The tail was mostly white with a dark band 1-2 inches wide near the tip. The very tip of the tail showed a narrow white band. In flight, I could see that the legs were pink. In flight, all of the primaries and the trailing edge of the secondaries were dark and the rest of the wing was lighter brown and speckled with dark spots. There was no light window on the wing like all of the nearby Herring Gulls showed. The mantle on the flying bird was heavily speckled with dark spots like we saw on the swimming bird. The underwing was very dark near the primaries and lighter on the innerwing.

Similar species and how eliminated: Second winter Herring Gull eliminated by size, bill size, lack of a gray mantle, lack of streaking on the head and underparts, lack of a window on the upperwing, by the all white tail with a dark band at the tip, and by the very dark underside of the primaries. Second winter Lesser Black-backed Gull eliminated by smaller size, browner uppertail, and heavily streaked head and underparts.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with the sun mostly behind us and the sky cloudy. Estimated viewing distance was 75 yards at the closest. I used Nikon 8 x 23 binoculars and a Bushnell 20-45x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have seen hundreds of Great Black-backed Gulls in Massachusetts and along the east coast.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America and  
Grant Guide to the Identification of Gulls

How long before field notes were made? immediately after each sighting

How long before this form was completed? written after first sighting  
and updated after second sighting