

DOCUMENTATION FOR UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTING

SPECIES: Great Black-backed Gull (Adult)

LOCATION: Mississippi River between Moline, Illinois and Bettendorf, Iowa.

DATE: 1 February, 1992 from 10:15-10:30AM

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, Iowa. 52240.

OTHER OBSERVERS: With me were Charles Fuller and Jane Fuller. Other observations the following day were made by Jim Scheib, Randy Pinkston, John Daniel, and Ann Johnson.

BACKGROUND: We were looking at gulls in the Quad Cities area, and had just seen an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull with a large group standing on the ice farther upstream. Near the 34th Street intersection with River Drive there was another large group of gulls standing on the ice near the Illinois shore. A very dark mantled gull was picked out in the group, which was lying on the ice and sleeping. After looking at it in that position for about five minutes, we did the wing flap maneuver and all the gulls got up and circled and eventually settled back down in about the same location. After settling down to sleep again, the wing flap again got the birds up and they later landed a little farther away, still at a good scoping distance. During its flight, the bird appeared to be in Iowa for a time on both occasions.

DESCRIPTION: The general size of the bird was obviously larger (maybe 20%) than the Herring gulls with it, and it looked almost twice as large as the Ring-billed gulls. It had a much larger head, and a massive bill, when compared to the Herring gulls. The upperwing and back were uniformly black, as the tips of the wings were just as dark as the rest of the upperwing, except for the white tips to the outer primaries. When the bird flew, there was a white trailing edge to the wing, and again it was easily the largest bird in the group. When in flight, it could be picked out with binoculars by size alone. The bill was massive, with a red spot on the lower mandible near, but not at, the end. The head and underparts were entirely white, with only a very little neck streaking. The legs were a dull pink (grayish-pink) color.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Size alone should eliminate all other dark mantled gulls. In addition, all of the other adult dark grey mantled gulls have a wing tip that is black, and darker than the rest of the upperwing and back, while this bird had a

uniformly black upperwing and back. None of the observers disagreed with the identification.

VIEWING CONDITIONS and OPTICS: The bird was observed when lying and standing on the ice at a distance of about 100 yards with a KOWA TSN-4 telescope (20-60X zoom lens). The day was cloudless, and we were looking toward the north to northeast. The lighting was good. During flight, the bird was followed at distances of from 100-600 yards with Swift Audubon 8.5 X 44 binoculars.

FIELD NOTES: Field notes were made immediately. No guides were consulted until that evening, and then National Geographic and Harrison's Seabirds were consulted. This was typed on 7 February, 1992.