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DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species? Lesser Black-backed Gull
How Many? 1 ad.
Location? Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co.

Habitat? sitting on ice above dam

Date? 29 Nov 1986
Time? 10:08 A.M. - 12:10 P.M.
Observers Name and address: Steve Dinsmore, Ames

Others who saw bird: Pete Wickham, Mark Brogie, Barb Wilson, Tanya Bray, Bery Engebretsen

Description of bird: I first noticed the bird because of its very dark mantle as compared to Herring and Ring-billed gulls. Over the next two hours, I took the following notes.

The bird was quite a bit larger than a Ring-billed Gull and slightly smaller than a Herring Gull. The mantle and wings were a very dark gray color (not really black). In flight, the mantle and wings were dark except for some white spots at the tips of the outer primaries and a narrow white trailing edge on the wing. The wingtips were darker than the rest of the wings and mantle. The underwing was very dark in the primaries and lighter near the rear of the wing. The bird also showed a dark carpal bar on the underwing in flight. In flight, the tail and rump were entirely white. The head and underparts were white except for some brown speckling on the breast and heavy brown streaking on the head and nape. There was a dark smudge around the eye. The bill was mostly yellow with a red spot near the tip of the lower mandible and some dusky color near the base of the bill. The legs were mostly pale and had a yellowish caste under good light. The feet appeared pinkish in the best light. When the bird was resting, its wingtips extended beyond the tail. After checking some of Barb Wilson's gull references that she had with her, we decided that the bird was molting from 3rd summer plumage to adult plumage. The bird had acquired most of its adult plumage.

Similar species and how eliminated: Great Black-backed Gull was eliminated by the smaller size, contrast between the wingtips and the rest of the wing, and by the heavy streaking on the head (head should be mostly white on a Great Black-backed Gull). California Gull was eliminated by the darker mantle, darker underwing and dark carpal bar, lack of a dark spot on the bill, and by the dark smudge at the base of the bill (this is characteristic of 3rd summer Lesser Black-backed Gulls and is never present on California Gulls).

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with the sun behind us and the sky partly to mostly cloudy. Estimated viewing distance was 250-300 yards at closest. I used a Bushnell 20-45x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I haven't seen any other Lesser Black-backed Gulls, but I have seen numerous Great Black-backed and California gulls.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America

How long before field notes were made? on spot

How long before this form was completed? 3 hours after sighting