

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Sabine's Gull (Juvenile)

LOCATION: NE and E of the end of the Babcock Access at the Hawkeye WA (Johnson County)

DATE & TIME: 18 August, 1999 (4:45-5:45 PM)

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

OTHERS: Tom Kent, James Huntington

DESCRIPTION: This bird was first discovered while flying by Tom Kent. We then watched the bird both flying and sitting for much of the next hour. The general size in comparison to nearby Ring-billed Gulls was much smaller, no more than two-thirds the size. The most striking feature of the flying bird was the three-tone upper wing pattern, which was a dark "M". The outer primaries were black, next there was a triangular white wedge, and the innermost portion was brownish-gray on the coverts. The back was also the same brownish-gray color. The tail was white, and obviously forked, although not deeply, and there was a relatively narrow black terminal band. When standing, the bird had generally brownish gray upperparts and white underparts. This back color also extended up onto the nape and crown. The dark tail tip and primaries contrasted with the lighter brownish gray of the rest of the upperparts. The bill appeared small and dark.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The forked tail should eliminate all other juvenile small gull species, except Black-legged Kittiwake. The Kittiwake is larger, has a narrower inner upperwing portion that is dark, has a light gray mantle, and has a dark nape line and a dark post auricular spot.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen this bird in juvenile plumage in Iowa seven previous times, and also in breeding plumage in Alaska.

OPTICS & VIEWING CONDITIONS: Most of the time the bird was viewed with a KOWA TSN-4 telescope (20-60 X Zoom), both when flying and standing. The closest the flying bird came was roughly 100 yards, and at times it was 3-500 yards away. When standing, it was about 300 yards away. It was partly cloudy, and viewing was toward the north and east while the bird was flying, and to the northeast when it was standing.

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES: Field notes were made after arriving home that evening, about 7 PM, and this form was typed on 21 August. National Geographic Field Guide was referred to while viewing the bird, and Grant's guide was seen that evening.