

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

extraordinary

93-34

What species? Great Black-backed Gull How many? 1

Location? Near Sewage treatment plant, Mississippi River, Keokuk, Lee Co. IA

Type of Habitat? River

When? date(s): Dec. 25, 1993 time: 2:00 PM to 2:30 PM

Who? your name and address: Bob Cecil 1315 41st St. Des Moines also about 4:00 PM

Others with you: John Cecil

Others before or after you: No

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior. I was looking at dark (1st Winter) Herrings trying to find a Thayer's when I noticed a very pale, very large 1st winter gull. I identified the bird as 1st winter as it had no gray (or in this case, black) feathering on the back. The back was an intricate pattern of brownish black and white, as was the wings.

Overall, the bird was huge, substantially larger than the 1st winter Herrings next to it. It appeared to be as much larger than Herrings as the Herrings were than Ring-bills, which were also next to the subject bird. I had a very large, heavy bill with a pronounced gonial angle. The bill was black to the base. The eye appeared black.

Except for the back and wings, the bird was almost completely white, including the head, underparts, and tail. The tail had a dark band, but as I saw the bird land and spread its tail, I saw that the band involved darkish terminal spots on white. It was not a solid dark band, although it appeared so when the bird was at rest. Although I concluded early on that this was a Great Black-backed, I had had no previous experience with this plumage, and was not expecting it to be so whitish/pale.

The legs were pink. There was a relatively short primary extension beyond the tail. The bird stood much taller than nearby Herrings.

Similar species; how eliminated: All other gulls eliminated based upon size alone.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? NO
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.
Distance about 100 ft. Lighting conditions not optimal- the sun was about 30 degrees to the side. Generally, though, conditions adequate to confirm ID. Used 20x Nikon scope and 10 Zeiss binocs.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen adults only.

References and persons consulted before writing description: After tentatively identifying it, we checked the National Geographic Guide.

How long before field notes made? At time this form completed? 4 days.

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).