

for IBL December '76

Black-legged Kittiwake on the Coralville Reservoir.

On October 27, 1976 I was scanning the Coralville Reservoir with 7x35 binoculars where it is widest, due north of North Liberty. At 4:20 PM I noticed several gulls to the east. The light was excellent, since it was a clear day and the sun behind me was almost in line with me and the birds. Several of the gulls were clearly Ring-bills, but others were smaller. At least one of these ^{showed} the white wing triangles characteristic of adult Bonaparte's while banking. Soon my attention was fixed on another gull, however. This had a dark diagonal band crossing its secondaries, a black leading edge of the primaries, a slightly forked tail with a black edge and, when it banked at the proper angle, it revealed a prominent black nuchal crescent bordered above and below with white. The bird several times hovered briefly and made almost tern-like plunges. It then alighted on the water. I moved as close as I could (est. 300 meters) and set up my 20-45 x zoom scope. This confirmed the very clear nuchal crescent, disclosed a black spot behind the eye, an otherwise white head, and a rather stubby, all-black bill. Upon my return home, I alerted Mike and Carol Newlon, who also located the bird and confirmed my diagnosis of "immature Black-legged Kittiwake". I had previously seen a similar bird off a ferry in New Brunswick (July 1974). The black crescent in the back of the neck excluded two somewhat similar species: immature Bonaparte's and Black-headed Gulls, which also have more white in their wings (especially the latter). The even more improbable Sabine's Gull ~~was~~ eliminated because it has a gray triangle (not a diagonal band) on its wing and, in the immature plumage ~~gray~~ extending from the back on the head, without any nuchal band. The immature Little Gull is much smaller than the bird seen; if it does have a nuchal crescent, this is merely an extension of the gray back, from which it is not separated by white; and the ~~had~~ shows a black cap as well as retro-ocular spots. This seems to be only the third observation of the Black-legged Kittiwake in Iowa. However, American Birds reported 11 fall sightings of this pelagic gull in Illinois for the period 1971-75. N.S.HALMI, RR# 6, Iowa City, IA 52240.