

DOCUMENTATION FOR RARE BIRD SIGHTING IN IOWA

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Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)
West Okoboji Lake, Dickinson Co., 21 Nov 1999
early afternoon for approx. 10 minutes from 40 yds est.
30x spotting scope standing and 8x binocs in flight
partly sunny from behind us

The bird was standing on Manhattan Point with several Herring Gulls of various ages and many more Ring-billed Gulls, facing quarter-on towards Lee Schoenewe and I. It was a dark 1st year gull, similar to, but slightly smaller than, other 1st year Herring Gulls present. It had an all-black bill that was smaller than the other Herrings, and a smudge around each eye and onto the ear coverts that was darker brown than the rest of the head. The head and neck were paler than the chest and back. The legs were pale pink. Lee and I waited for about 10 minutes for the bird to turn to the side, showing us blackish wingtips and dark tertials, eliminating the Thayer's Gull possibility we had been considering. The wing tips extended farther beyond the body than on the Herring Gulls.

We decided to flush the birds to see the gull in flight. When it took off, its rump was obviously paler than the back and the dark terminal tailband. Also visible in flight were the darker primary and secondary coverts, making a second dark bar running parallel to the secondaries. There was no pale "window" in the inner primaries as in a Herring Gull. We both agreed that the bird was a Lesser Black-backed Gull, the first I've seen.

I took no notes at the time, but this documentation was written about 5 hours after the sighting.