

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Lesser Black-backed Gull

Number: 1 fourth-basic

Location: Ottumwa, Wapello Co., IA

Habitat: river

Date: 6 January 1997

Time: 3:10-3:30 p.m.

Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50014

Others who saw bird: none

Description of bird(s): I arrived at the lowhead dam on the Des Moines River hoping to find a few gulls. Among the 60 or so gulls present was a distinctly darker-mantled gull which I recognized as a Lesser Black-backed Gull. The bird was slightly smaller and slimmer than a Herring Gull, but larger than a Ring-billed Gull. The bird was in adult plumage except for two features: the legs had a pinkish cast (not yellow) and the bill was black with the distal one third yellow. The bill was otherwise rather slender and lacked the appearance of a bulbous tip. The head was white with some gray/brown smudging on the nape. The underparts and tail were white. The upperwings and mantle were a dark, charcoal gray (at a distance appearing black), except that the distal portions of the primaries were black and there was a large, white subterminal mirror on the outer primary. The underwing was paler, although the dark color in the primaries was still visible. I aged the bird as fourth-basic on the basis of the leg and bill patterns. Grant (1986) notes, "some (possibly mainly fourth-winters) have blackish of variable extent on bill. ...a few (as high as 3% in some large samples) have adult plumage but fleshy or grayish legs."

Similar species and how eliminated: The bird was in the company of Ring-billed and Herring gulls which were easily eliminated on the basis of mantle color. California Gull is slightly smaller, is lighter-mantled, and shows more white in the primaries. Great-black-backed, Slaty-backed, and Western gulls are all larger and have heavier bills.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent-sun directly behind me and sunny skies. Estimated viewing distance initially 35m, and never more than 200m. I used 10x42 binoculars and a 20-60x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have seen many Lesser Black-backed Gulls in North Carolina, including several individuals in this plumage. I have also seen this species several other times in Iowa where most have been adults.

References consulted: Grant (1986) Gulls: A guide to identification

How long before field notes made: none written

How long before this form completed: written 7 January 1997