

## DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

**Species:** Great Black-backed Gull; **Number:** 1 first-winter.

**Location:** Lock and Dam 15, Davenport, Scott Co., IA.

**Date:** 12 February 1995; **Time:** 11:30 a.m. to 12:10 p.m.

**Name and address:** Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

**Others before/with/after:** Reported yesterday by Tim Schantz; maybe the same bird seen by Jim Fuller on 2 Jan.

**Habitat and circumstances:** Mississippi River, mostly frozen above dam.

**Description of bird:** After 3 hours of searching up and down the river, I was scoping the gull flock that was resting on the ice above the dam when a gull with a large white head and all black bill stood up and poked at several Herring Gulls. It settled down and I could no longer see it. As I continued to scope in hopes of seeing the bird again, an eagle flushed the gulls, and I was fortunate to pick the Great Black-backed out by its size and extensive dark outer wing. I watched it fly to the dam. I went below the dam, and after several minutes picked the bird up as it flew around with Herring Gulls. After about five minutes it lit on one of the gate houses of the dam and stayed there about five minutes while I viewed it in my telescope. When it took off, I had good views of both upper and lower parts in the scope. When first seen, I noted that the head and bill were larger than Herring's. In flight, I noted that the wingspan was about 15% greater than Herring's. It was easy to pick out by size alone. The head was white with a dark smudge through and behind the eye. The eye appeared dark. The bill was large and all black. The head and bill appeared flat and elongated. A Herring lit next to the bird for a few seconds, confirming the larger overall size and bill size of the Great Black-backed. The underparts were lightly mottled (very light brown or black). The mottling appeared to be in the form of rows of short bars. The back was barred. The tail was mostly white with a subterminal black tail band occupying about 1/8 of the tail. The proximal edge of the band was irregular. The legs were pink. In flight, the belly appeared somewhat dark. The primaries were dark, not pure black, but not brownish like Herring Gulls either. There was a wide dark secondary bar. The window area was lighter from above. From below, the wing coverts were darker than the secondaries but not as dark as the flight feathers.

**Voice:** Not heard.

**Similar species:** The size and pattern do not fit any other species or plumage.

**Any one have reservations?:** No.

**Light:** Sunny; mostly side lighting. **Distance:** 50 to 300 yards; **Optics:** 10x binocular, 20x scope.

**Previous experience:** Have seen and photographed many on East Coast. Have seen second-winter and adult birds in Iowa.

**References before/after viewing:** I looked at National Geographic Guide while viewing.

**Time of notes:** During observation. **Final typing:** 5 hours.