

Laughing Gull

11 May 1995

Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA

\*Pam Allen, \*T. Kent

P-0449, IBL 65:73, 66:96; Kent 1995

Record Number: 95-17

Classification: A-P

#### DOCUMENTATIONS

Pam Allen, 1601 Pleasant St., West Des Moines 50265 [8/13/95]

Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

#### PHOTOGRAPHS

T. H. Kent, P-0449

#### REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 65:73

Records Committee: 66:96

Kent, T. H. 1995. Laughing Gull at Saylorville Reservoir. Iowa Bird Life 65:102.

#### VOTE: 7 A-P

A-P, Full hood, heavy bill, wing pattern, and size are clinchers.

A-P, Observers did not mention significant primary extension past tail for this species; Franklin's shows little or no such extension. However I believe photos show this.

## LAUGHING GULL AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

THOMAS H. KENT

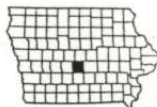
Gordon Brown reported to the Birdline an adult Laughing Gull that he saw below the Saylorville Reservoir dam on 10 May 1995. I arrived there the next morning at 8:10 a.m. The black-hooded gull was easily picked out from the first-summer Ring-billed and Herring gulls and alternate-plumaged Caspian Terns present. It was 10 to 15 percent smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls, but its legs were nearly as long. The all-black hood extended to the back of the nape. There were white crescents above and below the eyes. The lower one was just a thin white line. The upper one was slightly wider and more on the posterior side than the anterior side of the dark eye. The bill was about two-thirds as long as that of the average Ring-billed Gull. It was dark gray-maroon and drooped smoothly at the upper tip. The legs were dark dusky-pink. The mantle was dark gray. I flushed the bird twice to see it in flight and to take photographs. The wing tips from the bend of the wing to the tip were black from above and below. On the upper surface, there was a thin white trailing edge on the secondaries and inner primaries. The proximal wing was dark gray above and nearly white below. There was no white between the distal black and proximal gray. The tail was all white -- no gray in the center. While on the bar, the bird was preening and standing. I was surprised when the bird let out a typical Laughing Gull laugh. Pam Allen also documented similar field marks and heard the bird call.

Laughing Gull has been found in Iowa each year since the first accepted record in 1989. Most have been juvenile or first-summer/second-winter birds found in summer or fall, although one adult was at Saylorville Reservoir on 13 Apr 1990 (IBL 61:20, 62:21). First- and even second-summer Franklin's Gulls may lack the white bar separating the outer black wing tip from the inner gray upper wing. Perhaps a better mark for separating these two species is the amount of black on the wing tip on the underside of the wing. Franklin's has a small amount giving a "dipped in ink" look, while Laughing has most of the outer part of the underwing black (Fig. 1).

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246



Figure 1. Adult Laughing Gull at Saylorville Reservoir. Note amount of dark on under part of outer wing.



## MEW GULL AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

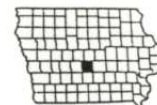
STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

At 3:42 p.m. on 20 December 1993, I observed an adult Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) on the jetty of the Lakeview Recreation Area at Saylorville Reservoir in Polk County. The bird was in the company of about 100 gulls, mostly Ring-billed and Herring gulls, that were resting and feeding around the jetty. The bird remained on the jetty until 4:53 p.m., when it flew northeast over the lake to roost with other gulls on the open water.

The following description of the bird was written with the bird under direct observation. The most striking features were the small, slender bill, dove-like head shape, and darker mantle and upperwings. The bird was slightly smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls surrounding it, but not nearly as bulky. Its longer-winged appearance gave it a much slimmer look. The bill was very close to half the length of that of a Ring-billed Gull, and slightly slimmer. The bill was entirely yellow, lacking a ring or other markings, and appeared more pointed than the bill of a Ring-billed Gull. The head shape was also distinct, resembling that of a dove. This was further accentuated by the eye which seemed proportionately large when compared to the eye of a Ring-billed Gull. The eye appeared dark. The head was white with prominent brown markings, most noticeably across the nape. There was also a dark area surrounding the eye. The tail and underparts were also white. The upperwings and mantle were dark gray, a shade darker than those of a Ring-billed or Herring Gull. The outer two primaries (numbers 9-10) were mostly black, with large mirrors evident near the tips. In flight, the minimal amount of black on the remaining primaries (roughly numbers 5-8), the large amount of white color separating the gray upperwing from the black color in those primaries, and the broad white trailing edge to the wing were visible. The underwing was mostly white, except that the black primaries were visible on the underside of the wing. The legs were dull yellow-green and appeared duller than the legs of a Ring-billed Gull. The wing pattern, white tail, and yellow bill were all characters of an adult in basic (third-basic) plumage.

There are two subspecies of Mew Gulls that occur regularly in the Lower 48 states. The North American subspecies *L. c. brachyrhynchus* breeds in northwestern Canada and Alaska and is a widespread winter resident along the West Coast. In cases where subspecies has been mentioned, most, if not all, records of vagrant Mew Gulls in the interior U.S. appear to belong to this subspecies. The European subspecies *L. c. canus* occurs as a vagrant along the Atlantic Coast south to North Carolina. Adults are most easily separated by the amount of white in the primaries, with *canus* having the white color restricted to large white mirrors on the outer two primaries. *Brachyrhynchus* has much more white in the primaries, especially the divide between gray and black on the middle primaries [see Grant (1986), Tove (1993)]. The bird in question appeared to have too much white in the wingtip for *canus*. Furthermore, *canus* often shows a clear, dusky subterminal ring on the bill in basic plumage (Tove 1993), a feature this bird lacked.

This represents the third record of a Mew Gull in Iowa. The first record was of a second-basic *brachyrhynchus* from 16-31 December 1982 at Davenport (Kent 1983). The second record was of a first-basic bird, thought to be *canus*, on 19 December 1993 at Red Rock Reservoir (Johnson 1995). This species may be overlooked as a



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DOCUMENTATION

95-17

SPECIES: Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*)

HOW MANY: One (1)

LOCATION: Polk Co., below Saylorville Dam Spillway

DATE: 11 May 1995

TIME & LENGTH OF OBSERVATION: 7:15 - 7:30 a.m.

FIRST OBSERVATION MADE BY: Gordon Brown of Ames on 10 May 1995

DOCUMENTER'S NAME & ADDRESS: Pam Allen, 1601 Pleasant Street  
West Des Moines, IA 50265

OTHERS WHO SAW BIRD: Reid Allen

DESCRIPTION OF BIRD: This breeding-plumaged Laughing Gull was at first sitting on a small rocky/gravel spit out in the channel of the river. It was sitting next to a Caspian Tern and Ring-billed Gulls. This gull was about the same size as the Caspian Tern and was just a little bit smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls. The full black head on this gull was broken only by the incomplete and quite noticeable white eye-ring (which did not completely encircle the eye). The bill was a deep dark red with a slightly blackish tip to it. The bill was thin and drooping at the tip. The mantle was darkish grey/black and the primary wing tips were all black. The wings were thin, narrow and long, with a white trailing edge. The tail was white and the legs were a blackish/red. In flight there were no white tips to the primaries (they were completely black to the outer edges). The bird also called frequently as it sat on the gravel bar.

SIMILAR SPECIES & HOW ELIMINATED: Franklin's Gull is smaller and has white edges to its wing tips. The black cap does not extend as far down the back of the neck like the Laughing Gull. The call is much different.

VIEWING CONDITIONS: Excellent. Bright sunny day with sun at left as bird was being viewed. Also as it was up and flying around it was never between the sun and us. Seen from a distance of from 50 - 100 yards.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH SPECIES: Have seen these birds many times in South Texas.

EQUIPMENT: Kowa TSN-4 spotting scope; Bushnell 8x36 Custom Binoculars.

REFERENCES CONSULTED: FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA, National Geographic Society, Second Edition, 1987.

HOW LONG BEFORE FIELD NOTES MADE: While viewing bird.

HOW LONG BEFORE THIS FORM COMPLETED: May 31, 1995.

## DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

**Species:** Laughing Gull; **Number:** 1 adult

**Location:** Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co., IA

**Date:** 11 May 1995; **Time:** 8:10 to 8:40 a.m.

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

**Others before/with/after:** reported to birdline on 10 May

**Habitat and circumstances:** below dam on gravel bar in middle of Des Moines River

**Description of bird:** The black-hooded gull was easily picked out from the first-summer Ring-billed and Herring gulls and alternate Caspian Terns present. It was 10 to 15% smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls, but its legs were nearly as long as the Ring-billeds. The all black hood extended to the back of the nape. There were white eye crescents above and below. The lower one was just a thin white line. The upper one was slightly wider and more on the posterior side than the anterior side of the dark eye. The bill was about two-thirds as long as that of the average Ring-billed Gull. It was dark gray-maroon and drooped smoothly at the upper tip. The legs were dark dusky-pink. The mantle was dark gray. I flushed the bird twice to see it in flight and to take photographs. The wing tips from the bend of the wing to the tip were black from above and below. On the upper surface, there was a thin white trailing edge on the secondaries and inner primaries. The proximal wing was dark gray above and nearly white below. There was no white between the distal black and proximal gray. The tail was all white -- no gray in the center. While on the bar, the bird was preening and standing.

**Voice:** One time it opened its mouth and gave a series of loud laughing-like calls.

**Similar species:** The size and wing pattern is unlike any of the other hooded gulls (Little, Common Black-headed, Bonaparte's, Franklin's) that have occurred in Iowa. Of most concern is a first and second summer Franklin's, which may not show the white between the wing tip and mantle of the adult Franklin's. The bird in question had longer legs, longer decurved bill, and smaller eye crescents than would be expected on a Franklin's. The black on the wing tip was more extensive than would be found on a Franklin's, especially on the under surface. I had a good enough view that I should have seen the gray in the central area of the tail if it were a Franklin's. Finally, the voice alone would appear to separate these species.

**Any one have reservations?:** NA

**Light:** The sun was behind me. **Distance:** 30 yards (estimate); **Optics:** 10x binocular, 20x scope, 420 mm lens.

**Previous experience:** I have seen many Laughing and Franklin's gulls. I am quite familiar with the "laugh" of the Laughing Gull. This is the first adult that I have seen in Iowa.

**References before/after viewing:** National Geographic Guide after writing description and before viewing with scope and taking photos. I listened to tapes of the calls before writing the final draft.

**Time of notes:** when I went back to the car in the middle of the observation time; **Final typing:** 1 day.