

Mew Gull
19 Dec 1982
Lock and Dam 14, Scott Co., IA
*Kent, *Staudt, *Petersen, *Dwyer
IBL 53:12, 23, Kent 1983

Record Number: 82-36
Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Thomas H. Kent, 19 Dec
Thomas J. Staudt, 19 Dec
Peter C. Petersen, 19 Dec
Tim Dwyer, 20 Dec
Francis L. Moore, 31 Dec

PHOTOGRAPHS

Thomas H. Kent, P-0176 (IBL 53:46)
Peter C. Petersen, P-0175

LETTERS

Mike Newlon (comments), 25 Feb 1983
Jon Dunn to Pete Petersen, 15 March 1983
Bruce Peterjohn to Tom Kent, 17 March 1983
Kim R. Eckert to Tom Kent, 12 March 1983

REFERENCES

Christmas Bird Count: IBL 53:12
Field Reports: IBL 53:23
Kent, T. H. 1983. New Gull at Lock and Dam 14. IBL 53:45-46.
Photographs: IBL 53:46 (P-0176) VOTE: 3-I-P, 1-IV, 1 no vote,
2-abstain

IV, Mew Gull IV.

Bird certainly not a Laughing Gull. Mew Gull, L. c.
Brachyrhynchus, most likely; see comments. Surely a case for
outside review.

I-P, Experts (2) concur with Newlon's identification. The bird
appears to be beyond the extreme of Ring-bill variation -- dark
eye, slim bill, head wash and size all indicate L. canus b.

Photos and expert comment document Mew Gull [= I-P by
letter/tk].

REVOTE (at meeting, 23 April 1983): 4-I-P, 2-abstain

Mew Gull at Lock and Dam 14

Thomas H. Kent
211 Richards Street
Iowa City IA 52240

On December 19, 1982 at 9:40 AM at Lock and Dam 14, Scott County, while doing the Davenport Christmas Bird Count, Tom Staudt, Don and Jean Moeller, and I found an unusual gull sitting on the ice in the backwater area above the new lock at Lock and Dam 14 (see photos). It was slightly smaller (1-2 inches) than an adult Ring-billed Gull in the same field of view. We immediately noticed that the bird had a gray wash on the top of the head extending down on to the neck. We also noted that the underparts, although nearly white, were grayer than the Ring-bill. The bill was thin and straight (less bulbous at the tip than the Ring-bill) and dark at the tip shading to yellow-gray in the proximal two-thirds. The eye was dark without evident white crescents. The gray of the head extended just in front of and below the eye and covered the top and back of the head and upper neck with a crescent-like extension to the sides of the neck. The legs and feet were dusky yellow-green compared to the bright yellow of the Ring-bill and pink of the nearby Herring Gulls. When flushed, and later when seen flying over the lock, the mantle was medium gray (distinctly darker than the adult Ring-bill) and the black of the wing tip lacked white between it and the gray proximal wing feathers. The trailing edge of the secondaries and inner primaries was white. There was a small white mirror on the leading edge near the tip of the first two primaries which could be seen from above and below. The undersurface of the wing was white except for the black tip formed by the outer primaries. The tail was white except for a narrow broken subterminal black band which was difficult to see except when the bird was close and at an appropriate angle.

We were uncertain of the identification. After making detailed notes we found that the field guides lacked enough detail to help us. At noon, at Pete Petersen's home, using the description and photos in Grant (1982) we mistakenly identified the bird as a second winter Laughing Gull. After lunch, with the Petersen's group in tow, we found the bird again and photographed it. The bird was seen by many others during the next week and last seen on December 31 by Francis Moore.

Michael Newlon, in reviewing the photographs and documentations for the Records Committee, made the identification of Mew Gull. He excluded Laughing Gull on the basis of head, bill, and body shape, mirror on the wing tip, and bill and leg color (should be all dark in Laughing). Retrospectively, the differences in shape are obvious, but all of the primary observers fell into the same trap. Mew Gull had not been seriously considered because of its rarity and because Grant (1982) illustrates the Common (Mew) Gull of Europe, *Larus canus canus*, which has no black tail band in second winter plumage. The Alaskan race, *L. c. brachyrhynchus*, which winters south to California, has a black tail band in second winter.

The photographs and documentations were subsequently sent to Jon Dunn of Santa Barbara, California, and Bruce Peterjohn of Westerville, Ohio. They agreed with Newlon on a positive identification of Mew Gull. Arguments listed by the reviewers favoring Mew Gull over Ring-billed Gull, the only other serious alternative, included: (1) small size compared to nearby Ring-billed Gull (although it was noted that small Ring-bills do occur); (2) large dark eye (pale in Ring-bill); (3) dusky wash to head and neck (rather than brown streaking); (4) gray mantle (paler in Ring-bill); (5) dark unringed bill; (6) broad white trailing edge to secondaries and tertials; (7) black of greater primary coverts forming a double black bar effect to the upper wing tip; and (8) relative large size of white mirror in first two primaries (absent or small on first primary of Ring-bill).

The likelihood of Mew Gull occurring in Iowa appears to be remote. There are no records from any of the adjacent states except Minnesota, where an adult was observed on an island in Lake Superior on 19 September 1982 (Pieper 1982).

The Mew Gull, or Common Gull as it is known in Europe, nests in the

arctic and subarctic from Eastern Europe to Alaska and Western Canada. It winters south to California and the Mediterranean. There are scattered records from the East Coast of United States which are likely of the European race, *L. c. canus*. Records from central North America are exceedingly few. Two specimens of *L. c. brachyrhynchus* were obtained in Ontario on Lake Ontario, the first an adult male in winter plumage on 24 October 1967 and the second a first year female on 28 November 1967 (Andrle and Axtell 1969). A third Ontario record was of an adult on Lake Huron on 30 November 1979 (Am. Birds 34:269). There were June records from Churchill, Manitoba, in 1978 and 1979 (Am. Birds 32:333-334, 1177) and a March record of a first year bird in Denver, Colorado, in 1980 (Am. Birds 34:801).

The Iowa record of a Mew Gull is in line with the general increase of vagrant gulls in the Midwest. Documentation and photographs allowed the identification of an unusual looking gull even though the observers failed to make the correct identification. One should be aware, however, that the same type of evidence may negate an identification such as has occurred with recent reports of Thayer's Gull in Iowa.

References

- Andrle, R. F., and H. H. Axtell. 1969. Mew Gulls in Ontario. *Wilson Bull.* 81:211-213.
Grant, P. J. 1982. *Gulls: A Guide to Identification*. Vermillion, South Dakota: Buteo Books.
Pieper, B. 1982. A Lake Superior "pelagic" trip--Minnesota's first Mew Gull. *Loon* 54:247-248.



Mew Gull, 19 Dec 1982, Lock and Dam 14, T. H. Kent.

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation

by the Records Committee

of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: Mew gull, Larus canus

DATE SEEN: 19-26 Dec. 1982

SITE OF OBSERVATION: Lock + Dam 14, Scott Co., IA

OBSERVERS: T. Kent, T. Staudt, P. C. Petersen, T. Dwyer.

DATE OF REVIEW: mail vote (2/22); revote (4/23)

METHOD OF REVIEW: mail vote; discussion + revote.

CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: I-P

COMMENTS:

Based on a review of the literature and on comments by a number of outside reviewers, the Committee classified this as I-P, for a first state record.

Thank you for sending in the documentation.

- Mike Newlen

The opinions expressed here are based on the information available to the Committee and should not necessarily preclude an alternate interpretation by those who observed the bird firsthand.

Any action may be re-reviewed upon submission of additional evidence.

Explanation of Classification:

- I = labeled, diagnostic specimen, photograph, or recording available for review by the Committee
- II = acceptable sight record documented independently by 3 or more observers
- III = acceptable sight record documented by 1 or 2 observers
- IV = probably correct record, but not beyond doubt
- V = record with insufficient evidence to judge
- VI = probably incorrect identification, escapee, or otherwise unacceptable record

Classification is based on the highest category agreed upon by six of seven committee members.

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Laughing Gull How many? 1-2nd winterLocation? Lock and Dam 14, Scott Co. IowaType of habitat? Mississippi RiverWhen? date(s): 19 Dec 1982 time: 9:40-9:50 (est); 2:15-2:45Who? your name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City IA 52240others with you: Tom Staudt, Don and Jean Moeller, Peter and Mary Lou Petersenothers before or after you: none

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

AM notes: "A gull slightly smaller than adult Ring-bill (5 Herring & 1 Ring-bill present for comparison). Bird notably grayer than Ring-bill. Gray on top of head, forehead, back of neck and indefinitely down side of neck. Underparts whiter, but still distinctly grayer than underparts of Ring-bill. Bill thin and straight, less bulbous at tip than Ring-bill, and slightly shorter. Tip of bill black, shading to yellow-gray in proximal 2/3. Eye dark. Back and wing gray with black primaries. Legs yellow-green to dusky, less bright yellow than Ring-bill and pink of Herring. When flushed, mantle definitely gray -- noticeably darker than white of Ring-bill. Primaries black with no white between wing tip and mantle. Small white area at tip of wing, probably on leading edge. From beneath, wings nearly white with black tip formed by outer primaries. White, thin trailing edge on upper wing seen once. Tail white, quite square, and generally cupped in flight. Once I thought there might be a black tip centrally on the terminal part, but could not confirm this. Tail not knotted."

PM notes: "Bird on ice with Herring Gulls. Photos taken. Dark of head includes eye area. Bird seen flying for over 15 minutes as close as 30 feet. Definite black terminal band -- narrow and broken -- seen above and below. Definite white trailing edge to secondaries. White at wing tip confirmed -- just at tip on leading edge. Black of primaries from above somewhat irregular."

Later notes: The last five or so primaries formed a sharp black tip, but there was some indentation of the black anteriorly, so the black did not form a straight line.

Similar species and how eliminated: Separated from Ring-bill by gray head and mantle, wing-tip, size, character of terminal tail band, and bill color and shape. Separated from Franklin's by wing tip pattern (in face of nearly white tail, ie 2nd year bird)

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? Initially we were uncertain, but thought Laughing most likely. After making notes, consulting books, and
If yes, explain: finding the bird again, we felt certain of the identification.

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: Moderately heavy overcast. Excellent comparison with other gulls when bird standing on ice, seen close up in flight in PM. 50 yds when on ice; 30 ft in flight. 20x, 50x scopes, 8x binoc.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen many winter birds on Texas coast.

References and persons consulted before writing description: AM notes made first. Then looked at Robbins, Peterson, and Grant and consulted with Pete Petersen before finding the
How long before field notes made? 30 min AM, 15 min PM. 24 hours copied. this form completed? bird again.

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

What species? Laughing Gull How many? 1Location? Lock and Dam #14 on MississippiType of habitat? see first seen on iced over pond pond off main channel.When? date(s): December 19, 1982 time: 10 am to 11:30 am and 2:15 - 2:45 pmWho? your name and address: THOMAS J. STAUDTothers with you: Tom Kentothers before or after you: Pete, Macyleen Peterson

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

The bird was first seen with 5 Herring and 1 Ring-billed gull. Shape similar to Ring-billed, size slightly smaller.

Bill was two toned, outer half to tip black on upper and lower mandible. Inner half of bill to base was dark but lighter than outer tip. Bill width was the same at base as at tip. Ring-billed's bill was bulbous at tip.

Facial area at base of bill was a dirty white. Head was fluffed gray from forehead, over eye, crown area and back of head. Eye was black with a thin white line over it. Area below the eye was the same gray as above, but didn't extend very far below the eye.

The gray on the head became more concentrated at the back of the head, came down on nape and created a collar like effect curving forward. Immediately after this, in front of the mantle was a second "collar", this one white, that blended into breast.

Mantle was a solid deep gray. Primaries were black with a very small white spot, window, at the front end of the wing tips. The black from the primaries extended into the wrist area. There was a thin white trailing edge on the wings.

The tail was bright white with faint black spots noted when the tail was fanned. The spots created a faint band when the tail was held together. The spots were seen on lower and upper surface of tail. There was a thin white area at the end of the tail, behind the spots.

Chin and throat were light. Breast and underparts light. Breast had some specks of dark gray. Legs and feet were green/gray.

Similar species and how eliminated: Ring-billed is slightly larger. Adult would have all white tail with white tail. Second winter bird would have a broader tail band, mantle not as gray. Bill as noted above. Franklin's gull by ~~mantle~~ mantle color again and spots in tail.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? _____

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:
overcast 90 to 100 yds estimated.7x binoculars, 20x scope, 50x scopePrevious experience with species and similar ones: none with this species, very limited with Franklin's gullReferences and persons consulted before writing description: above mentioned people, Robbins and Peterson guides and a British book on gulls.How long before field notes made? 1st sighting 1/2 hour 2nd sighting immediately after this form completed? 7 hrs. 911 after field notes were taken

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

What species? Laughing Gull How many? 1 (one)Location? Locks + Dam #14, Pleasant Valley, Scott Co., IA.Type of habitat? Mississippi River + ponding areas along sameWhen? date(s): Dec. 19, 1982 time: 2:15 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.
Dec. 20, 1982 8:25 AM to 9:00 AM.Who? your name and address: Peter C. Petersen 235 McClellan Blvd. Davis A. 53803others with you: 12/19 Mary Lou Petersen, T. H. Kent, Tom Staudt, Bob Lindenothers before or after you: 12/20 Clark Scott, Larry Linden + Tim Dwyer
12/19 Kent + Staudt

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior. Typical gull, smaller than

12/19 Herring Gulls with it, about Ring-billed size. Bill dark at tip, lighter at base, white band over shoulders, face white at base, top of head uniform grey also back of head, small white line over eye. Back of neck heavy or darker grey. Mantle solid grey, no variation, outermost 5 primaries black with 3 white-tipped slightly. Belly white, legs grey-green, also feet. Back of neck just above back fleeced grey. ~~under~~ wing showed white trailing edge from below. Tail white with some black tipped feathers.

12/20 Bill brownish (dark), black at tip. Head mottled grey on top + back. Underbody areas white. Mantle grey, trailing edge of wing white, most noticeable when standing on ice, 4 or 5 outer primaries entirely black except 2 or 3 with very small white spots on tip and small triangle area toward fore edge of wing. Tail white except partial black edge or band near tip. (of black)
Legs ^{feet} greyish



Similar species and how eliminated: Franklin's Gull - this bird had no white on upper surface of wing between black + grey areas, faint grey on back of head, no light tip on bill.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? no.

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:
12/19 Overcast, fairly bright. Distance 75-150 yards when on ice, 30-250 yards in flight. 10x40 red prism binoculars, 15-60x60 scope used at 30+55x primarily, 1000mm telephoto lens. 12/20 - same optical equip. 12/20 partly cloudy sun at angle. From behind obs. distances about same as 12/19.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: March obs. on Texas coast (1980) for Laughing
several obs. of winter pl. Franklin'sReferences and persons consulted before writing description: Grant-Gulls checked before bird seenHow long before field notes made? both days during obs. this form completed? 12/19 7 hrs. 12/20 8 hrs.

(12/19) Notes made from verbal desc. by T. Staudt to M.C.P.
MATI TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

What species? 2nd Winter Laughing Gull (Larus atricilla) How many? 1Location? Mississippi River Lock & Dam 14, Iowa sideType of habitat? RiverWhen? date(s): December 20, 1982 time: 9:45 A.M. to 10:30 A.M., EstimateWho? your name and address: Tim Dwyer, 104 1/2 E. 9th St. Muscatine, Iowa, 52761others with you: Peter Petersen & two other gentlemen were there when I arrived.

others before or after you: _____

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior. Size - smaller & slimmer thanRing-Billed Gull. Wings & mantle - Gray. Wingtips black, then white on tips. Belly, breast, throat and head white. Head with gray mottling blending into the back. Forehead and lower cheeks whiter. Eye dark. Bill & feet dark. Tail - white with black on center tail feathers close to the tip.When I arrived at L+D 14 the bird flew over me when I was barely out of the car. I ran into Petersen & Company and Pete & I talked about the bird while we watched it fly around. It soon landed on the ice with Herring Gulls and one Ring-Billed Gull. This was a pod on the Iowa shore. I went back to my car, Petersen left, and I got my scope & tripod. The bird was still there and I observed it preening from about 50 yards for about 15 minutes. When almost back to the car, the gull flew over me again, giving me a second aerial view.Similar species and how eliminated: Franklin's Gull is smaller, thinner billed. Shading on head has a hood-like appearance. First winter Franklin's has dark wingtips. Older birds have white-black-white wingtips. The bird in question had black-white wingtips. I could judge the size against one Ring-Billed Gull and several Herring Gulls near by.
Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? Yes, I was concernedIf yes, explain: about the white wing tips until I found a photograph showing this on a Laughing Gull. The photo was of a winter plumage bird.

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Cloudy day at 50 yards (est.)^{birds} sitting on ice, using a 36X Scope on a tripod also in the air at various distances using 8X40 binoculars. As close as 25 ft.Previous experience with species and similar ones: Many Summer Plumage birds North Carolina & South Carolina coasts in 1975. Many Franklin's Gulls, South Dakota in 1976.
References and persons consulted before writing description: Pete Petersen, A Field Guide to the Birds (Peterson 1980), many other bird books.How long before field notes made? None Made this form completed? 11 days

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Laughing Gull (Larus atricilla) How many? 1 (one)

Location? Lock + Dam #14, off U.S. 67 between Bettendorf and Le Claire, Iowa, Scott County on the low side of the Mississippi

Type of habitat? Bird was loafing on ice in immediate forewaters of the lock River.

When? date(s): December 31, 1982 time: 2:40 to 2:55 p.m.

Who? your name and address: Francis L. Moore, 264 Western Ave., Waterloo, IA 50701

others with you: No

others before or after you: Pete + Mary Lou Peterson, Tom Kent, Tom Stought + Others

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Bird was typical gull shape. It was ^{standing} on ice with 4 Ring-billed Gulls to the left of it and a Herring Gull directly behind it. It was smaller than the Ring-billed's and a lot smaller than the Herring. The tip of the bill was blackish fading to a lighter color at base (a brownish color not pink or yellowish). The bill did not seem as large at the tip as the Ring-bill's. Overall impression of the bird was that it was much grayer overall than the Ringbill's. It had a light grayish wash to the neck and breast and a whitish belly, the forehead was also washed with gray but whitish at the upper base to the bill. The eye was dark with a hint of a broken whitish eyering above and below. The area directly behind the eye was a darker gray flaked area. The area at the hind neck and extending toward the breast was a little darker gray than the breast with a lighter area directly in front of the wing. The mantle was a medium gray color. The primaries were blackish with several small white spots at the tips of the 5th, 6th, + 7th (or thereabouts) primaries; there was also a larger white spot on the leading edge of the first primary. The wing had a thin trailing edge on the secondaries. The tail was white with a broken and splotched dark band near the terminal end with a thin white terminal end to the tail. Feet were smallish with a grayish-green color. No voice was heard. (See Field Sketch).
Similar species and how eliminated: Smaller than Ring-billed and Herring. Appeared to be a 2nd winter bird and was grayer than a 1st winter Franklin's might appear. All field marks taken together suggest a 2nd winter Laughing Gull.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? Identification is very difficult but with all field marks taken together there is a consensus of everyone I have talked to that the bird is a laughing gull.

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: Viewing conditions very good, bright overcast at times sun shown through cloud cover. Distance approximately 50 yards using 7x35 B+L Roof Prism binoculars, Bushnell 20x60 Spacemaster telescope and Celestron C90 telescope mounted on Nikonmat camera body at 20x.
Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen Laughing gulls in winter on coast of Virginia several years ago. Have not seen Franklin's Gull in full winter plumage.
References and persons consulted before writing description: After taking field notes, I talked with Pete Peterson and looked at Robbins, Peterson and Grant books.
How long before field notes made? 30 min. this form completed? 2 days

NOTES

LAUGHING GULL
Seen approx 50-75 yds.

12/31/82

82-36
MOORE

for 15 minutes 2:40 - 2:55 pm

notes made
3:30

bill thinner than
ring bills not
bulbous as in
ring bills

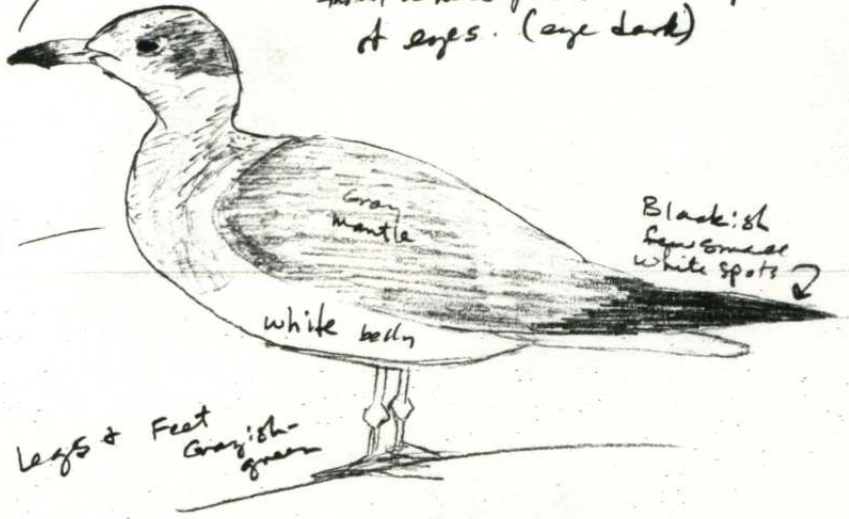
tip blackish
fading to brown
light at base

thin white patches on top + bottom
of eyes. (eye dark)

grayer than
ring bills

mantle grayer than
ring billed's

light gray
wash



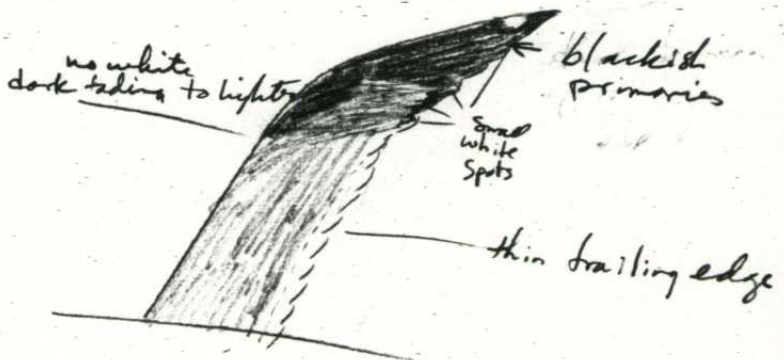
legs + feet
Grayish-green

Smaller than
ring bills beside it
Lots smaller to
Herring

tail-white
with thin dark
band



band made up of
splashes + spots on
individual tail inner
feathers not continuous



overcast to partly cloudy
to sunny

Comments on the gull recently seen at Lock 14 (Iowa record 82-36).

Several features suggest to me that this bird is not a Laughing gull:

1. Proportions: Laughing gull is small-headed, big-billed, long in the wing and body, long-legged. It has a very horizontal stance when at rest. The Davenport bird is built like a miniature Herring gull, shorter in the body and wing, short-legged, with a proportionally large head and a diminutive bill.
2. Plumage and soft parts: In the color photos the mantle appears too pale for Laughing, although this could be an artifact; I have seen similarly-pale photos of genuine Laughing. But as far as I know Laughing always lacks the subterminal white spot in the outer primary, tends to have dark mottling on the head that is smudgy rather than speckly, lacks the dark shawl effect that this bird has, and at any plumage has an all-dark bill (dark blackish red in the breeding season, black at other times). Also has dark legs.

If the bird is not a Laughing gull, what is it?

Many features of its plumage indicate that it is one winter away from full adult plumage: the lack of brown/mottled juvenile feathers in wing-coverts or body, the lack of a dark bar on secondaries or carpal region, the irregular and rather faint dark subterminal band on the tail, and the bill with paler basal part and dusky tip. For a gull of this size, this indicates second-winter plumage.

Most of the medium-sized larids can be ruled out:

California is too large and has too large a bill.

Kittiwake in second-winter plumage lacks a prominent nuchal collar and lacks the subterminal white spot in the outermost primary in any plumage. Second-winter also lacks tailband.

Franklin's gull moults into def. adult plumage in its second winter, but is extremely unlikely to occur in the interior US at this time of year. However it should have a more distinct and concentrated 'partial hood' and ought to lack the 'shawl'. Before the primary moult it should lack the subterminal white spot in the outermost primary and after it it should have both extensive white in the medial portions of the primaries and white tips to the inner ones, all of which this bird lacks.

Ring-billed and Mew gull remain. The latter has several subspecies, one (L.c. canus) found in Europe, a vagrant on the NE coast of North America, and another (L. c. brachyrhynchus) breeding in northern Alaska and the NW Territories of Canada and wintering on the Pacific coast; the latter is a much more likely vagrant to the midwest, and shows some slight plumage differences from the European subspecies. Despite its rarity, I believe that the Davenport bird is of this species, for the following reasons:

1. The diminutive size and tiny bill (although dwarf Ring-bills have been reported from the NE U.S.).
2. The darkness of the mantle (Mew gull is darker than Ring-billed).
3. The extremely heavy mottling on the head and neck and the clouding of the underparts with dusky. (Ring-billed is quite clean in this plumage and only very lightly speckled on the head and neck, clean white below.)

4. The prominent white tertial crescents; not so marked in the Ring-bill.
5. Features indicative of *L. c. brachyrynchus* rather than *L. c. canus* are the incomplete tail-band, and the dusky on the alula and primary coverts; *L. c. canus* is said to lack these.

Literature consulted:

- Ridgeway, R. Birds of North and Middle America (not very helpful).
- Bent, A. C. Life Histories of North American Gulls and Terns. (descriptions of second-winter plumages).
- Dwight, J. The Gulls (Laridae) of the World. Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist. 52 (1925).
- Lauro and Spencer, A Method for Separating Juvenal and First-Winter Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) and Common Gulls (*Larus canus*).
(Mostly about how to separate *L. delawarensis* from *L. c. canus*; a few comments on 2-w plumages and *L. c. brachyrynchus*.) Am. Birds 43(2):111.
- Grant, P. J. Gulls: A Guide to Identification. (Detailed descriptions of *L. delawarensis* and *L. c. canus*.)
- Weber, J.W. The *Larus* Gulls of the Pacific Northwest's Interior, Part II. Continental Birdlife 2(3):74, 1981. (Mantle colors of western North American gulls.)

from Mike Newton
2/25/83

82-36

March 15, 1983

Dear Pete,

Having carefully reviewed the record of the gull this winter, I am in complete agreement with Mike Newlon that the bird is a 2nd winter Mew Gull. As you no doubt have already realized Laughing Gull is totally out of the question for a wide variety of reasons, so I won't dwell on them here. The only question is if the bird is a Ring-billed or a Mew Gull. For a variety of reasons I feel that the bird is clearly Mew. First the size (smaller than adjacent Ring-billeds) is clearly indicative of Mew as is the thin appearing bill. Also indicative is the large (& dark) appearing eye in the head. I've always been impressed with that feature on our Mew Gulls. Ofcourse the apparent dark iris ^{is} indicative of Mew as a 2nd winter Ring-billed Gull would have a yellowish-gray or a whitish-gray iris color. The dark mantle is also a feature that is most helpful. I find Mew Gulls to have the same mantle shade as a California Gull, being substantially darker than the mantle color of either the Ring-billed or the Herring. Additionally the broad white trailing edge to the wing (esp. on outer secondaries, _{is} a feature that I think might be helpful in telling it from Ring-billed which has a thinner white trailing edge against a paler mantle, although this character needs more study. The bill color is also wrong for Ring-billed, typically by 2nd winter they ^(Ring-billed) already have a rather adult like subterminal black band, although the overall bill color ^{in 2nd winter} is duller. Finally, the extensive brown head wash (including the sides of the neck) is perfect for Mew and wrong for Ring-billed. A 2nd winter Ring-billed would appear whiter headed and the brown visible would be in the form of distinct streaks rather than a wash. Another feature that might be helpful in comparing 2nd winter birds of these two species is the wing tip pattern. I often get a feeling that in Mew there is a more extensive black crescent formed by extensive dark tips to the greater primary coverts. It gives a double dark bar on the wing. To me Ring-billed appears more solidly dark. This feature needs more checking.

I am also in agreement with Mike that the bird is our race, brachyrynchus. I don't know nominate canus well but that form typically lacks dark in the tail in 2nd winter, has more distinct head streaks (like Ring-billed) rather than a wash and would appear somewhat larger billed.

In summary I can find absolutely nothing wrong for your bird being a 2nd winter Mew Gull. That was my immediate reaction upon looking at the photos and nothing has swayed my opinion since. I would be happy

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to answer additional correspondence on the subject if needed, including why the bird isn't a Laughing, but I assume that this possibility has been dismissed.

One final comment- the photos are perfectly adequate to establish the identity of the bird, even without the field notes, although the notes are helpful and are certainly an important part of the record.

All the best Pete,

Jon Dunn

Jon Dunn
4710 Dexter Dr., #7
Santa Barbara, CA 93110

82-26

105-K E. Ticonderoga Dr.
Westerville, OH 43081
March 17, 1983

Dear Tom:

other material
not relevant
omitted here

The other gull is much more interesting. The photographs conclusively eliminate Laughing and Franklin's Gulls based on bill, head, leg and wing pattern characteristics. Overall size and bill size and shape would appear to eliminate California Gull. What remains is

Tom Kent
March 17, 1983
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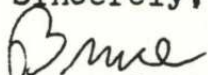
distinguishing between a Mew Gull and an aberrant Ring-billed. My thoughts are as follows:

1. Dark gray mantle: although not clearly shown in the photos, if the mantle was noticeably darker than the adjacent gulls (which every observer seemed to agree), this characteristic probably provides the strongest evidence of a Mew Gull.
2. Dark eye: Ring-billeds normally have a yellow iris in second-winter plumage while Mews have brown iris. This field mark is also very supportive of a Mew Gull identification.
3. The dusky head marking aren't typical of a Ring-billed and more suggestive of a Mew Gull. However, these markings are variable and I wouldn't base an identification on them.
4. The white spots on the outer primaries are the proper size for a Mew Gull and larger than a typical Ring-billed. However, I have observed 1 or 2 Ring-billed with similar spots.
5. The white edgings on the tertials are larger than a typical Ring-billed but this feature is also variable to some extent.
6. The overall size and bill size and shape appear correct for a Mew Gull but I have seen a number of diminutive Ring-billeds that are quite similar. These features are important but not necessarily indicative of either species.

Based on the photos and documentations, I feel confident the bird was a Mew Gull. While it may be premature, I would like to include this sighting in the winter report (I feel that confident). If you want me to wait, let me know. If possible, can you send me copies of the black and white prints that I placed an X beside? If you can't get them to me by April 15, send them directly to Bob Arbib.

Several unrelated comments. The earliest spring Pectoral Sandpiper in Ohio is Feb. 28, 1981 (see the winter season 1981 issue of American Birds). I presume your February sighting was an early migrant rather than a wintering bird based on the substantial migration of other early species at that time. Secondly, I have accumulated a number of gull slides over the years and have given talks on gull identification. If you think the Iowa Ornithologists Union would benefit from such a talk, let me know and perhaps we could work out the details.

I hope these comments are useful to you. Let me know if I can provide further assistance.

Sincerely,

Bruce Peterjohn

KIM R. ECKERT
9735 NORTH SHORE DRIVE
DULUTH, MINNESOTA 55804

82-36

March 12

Tom —

Help! Unless I hear from you or someone else, I'm afraid I can't go along with the Laughing Gull on the Davenport CBC. Although the 5 pages of written descriptions and the sketch certainly sound like a Laughing Gull, ~~the~~ the 4 photos you took + included with the CBC are of a second-winter Ring-billed Gull with a lot of head/neck mottling. Tail, mantle pattern, leg color, bill color and specially bill shape suggest Ring-billed, and the slightly-smaller-than-Ring-billed size ~~it~~ easily fits a smaller ♀ Ring-billed. Bill + leg colors on imm. gulls is highly variable ~~but~~ these seem to fit Ring-billed better than Laughing. A Laughing has a very distinctive bill shape (as shown in Frances Moore's sketch which had to have been copied from a field guide ~~it~~ — it doesn't compare at all with your photos). Also there's too much dark mottling on the head/neck for this to be a Laughing — although a typical Ring-billed doesn't have this much, I have seen both Herring's + Ring-billeds this dark. Also the white mirror in the outer primary shown clearly in one photo is typically sub-adult Ring-billed + in my opinion completely eliminates Laughing —

(OVER)

I hate to have to be the skeptical villain in this, and I ⁸⁷⁻³⁶
await your reply with every expectation of being lambasted.
After all, you saw the bird and I didn't - all I have to go
on are the details and the photos. Please let me know if my
skepticism is out of line & if you still believe it was a
Laughing Gull. Please also write (or call if you feel like
it - 218-525-6930) as soon as possible, since I have to
return the edited CBCs within a week or two.

Thanks,

Kim

PS - In all, the Iowa CBCs are much better as far as reliability
goes than last year, although I'm having trouble believing
the following: Green Heron (no details) and Ross' Goose
(identified only by size in flight) at Shenandoah, 2 Ross'
Geese (no details) and 75 redpolls (no details) at
DeSoto NWR, an Ovenbird (no details) Davenport count
week, and 4 Chipping Sparrows (no details) at Lucas.
If you have any comments on these I'd also appreciate
them.