

Laughing Gull
26 Jun 1987
Coralville Res., Johnson Co., IA
*Richard Hollis
IBL 57:120, 58:75

Record Number: 87-15
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Richard Hollis

LETTERS

Bruce [Peterjohn] to James Dinsmore, 24 August 1987
[Tom Kent] to Bruce Peterjohn, 28 November 1987
Bruce Peterjohn to Tom Kent, 5 December 1987

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 57:120
Records Committee: IBL 58:75

VOTE: 3-IV, 1-V, 3-VI

VI. The description is entirely consistent with first summer Franklin's Gull

VI. Description fits first summer Franklin's Gull. I don't think any of 4 points given by Hollis are distinctive. Shape and posture of bird should be described. I probably saw this bird, but at a great distance.

IV. The description as written does not completely rule out Franklin's Gull. For such a rare bird in Iowa, seen at close range, an elimination of similar species should be given especially given the similarity between Laughing and Franklin's Gulls.

IV. Possibly correct ID but more details, such as bill size and shape, would have been helpful. The lack of obvious white on wings does not rule out Franklin's.

VI. Not convinced it was not a 1st year Franklin's. Tail has only light grey in center area.

IV. Not enough detail to separate conclusively from Franklin's. First summer Franklin's very similar. Critical points not well described, such as extent of hood, degree of whiteness of tail, and extent of white tips in primaries. Also no discussion of structure and shape of bird. I am of the feeling that this bird and the next one are the same bird.

V. Laughing gull is possible but some subadult Franklin's have partial black hood combing with a juvenile wing pattern that looks like Laughing Gull.

105-K E. Ticonderoga Dr.
Westerville, OH 43081
24 Aug. 1987

87-15

James Dinsmore
Dept. of Animal Ecology
124 Science II
Iowa State University
Ames, IA 50011

Dear Jim,

Many thanks for promptly sending the Iowa summer report as well as the supplemental information. Your promptness and thoroughness makes my task much easier.

With regards to the rarities cited in your report, my thoughts are as follows:

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck: An intriguing record. Certainly common in captivity and most previous extralimital records are thought to be escapes. However, this species is increasing and expanding its range and is certainly a candidate for vagrancy. At present, I intend to treat it as a conjectural record, realizing that future sightings may eventually indicate it was actually a legitimate vagrant.

Prairie Falcon: Intuitively, this sighting does not sit well with me. His description sounds fairly good, but I am troubled by the bird's "buffy breast". I have never seen a Prairie Falcon that appeared to have buffy underparts. I wonder if he wasn't looking at juvenile Swainson's Hawks or perhaps even Red-taileds. Given the known breeding range of Prairie Falcons, I can't accept this records without better details.

Laughing Gulls: Both records are definitely second-year Franklin's Gulls.

Rufous Hummingbird: This sighting will not be included unless I receive some substantiating details. Could easily be last year's bird returning to the same feeder, but I need some details.

Steller's Jay: Not the most detailed description but the documentation leaves little doubt that the bird was correctly identified. Given the time of year, it must have escaped or been turned loose. I intend to treat it as a conjectural sighting.

Hope you have another eventful fall migration in Iowa. The birding has been rather routine here with no unusual rarities. This weekend's cold front was accompanied by the first wave of passerines with at least 19 species of warblers along Lake Erie yesterday.

Sincerely,

Brune

copy 87-15

28 Nov 1987

Bruce Peterjohn
105-K E. Ticonderoga Dr.
Westerville, OH 43081

Dear Bruce,

I understand that Dennis Thompson was quite upset when the IOU Records Committee did not accept his Laughing Gull sighting at Saylorville Res. on 29 June 1987. In your letter to Jim Dinsmore of 24 Aug you state, "Both records are definitely second-year Franklin's Gulls."

Could you provide us with your reasoning so that we can use your experience to explain to Dennis why he was incorrect in his identification. I enclose a copy of the documentation and a copy of the comments from our Records Committee review.

Our fall has been warm and a bit slow, except for a Groove-billed Ani that was very cooperative for three weeks. The gulls are still not down in big numbers. For the third year in a row I took a pre-Thanksgiving tour of NW Iowa, but didn't find much unusual except for the lack of 1000s of horned larks, longspurs, and snow buntings we had the last two years when it was cold and snowy.

Editing the journal has curtailed my birding a lot. I did get to Colorado this summer for a few days; otherwise, I haven't been on any big trips since California in 1985 and Alaska in 1986.

I hope all is going well with you.

With best regards,

105-K E. Ticonderoga Dr. 87-15
Westerville, OH 43081
5 Dec. 1987

Tom Kent
211 Richards St.
Iowa City, IA 52240

Dear Tom,

Sorry to hear that your birding has been somewhat curtailed during the past year but I can certainly sympathize with your situation. I have undertaken the task of writing a book on the birds of Ohio and most of my spare time will be devoted to that endeavor (at least until July or August).

With regards to Dennis Thompson's gull sighting (29 June 1987 at Saylorville Reservoir), adults of both Franklin's and Laughing Gulls would still have complete black hoods during late June. The description of a partial hood ("posterior half of head was black, rest white") indicates a bird in second summer plumage (they attain their adult plumage by their third year).

His description of the partial hood was perfect for a second summer Franklin's Gull. Laughing Gulls have a more variable head pattern in this plumage. Most have no black at all, rather a poorly defined grayish-brown collar of variable width across the back of the head. A minority will have some black feathers mixed with the gray collar. A few will even have fairly extensive black heads, but white feathers are scattered throughout and give a decided mottled appearance to the head rather than a clear cut partial hood (see plate #119 in the first edition of Grant's gull identification book for such a dark headed Laughing Gull or plate #155 in the second edition). Thompson's description of a clear cut partial hood just does not fit any second summer Laughing Gull I have seen.

The described wing pattern could fit either species. While some second summer Franklin's will have a few white terminal "mirrors" on the primaries, many do not and have entirely black primaries similar to a Laughing Gull.

His description of size and shape was based totally on subjective characteristics (and he did not state which other species were present for direct comparison). Additionally, both species are somewhat variable with regards to these characteristics and a male Franklin's can closely approach a female Laughing Gull in bill features, overall size and shape (see measurements in Grant's book for example).

In conclusion, his description did not satisfactorily eliminate Franklin's Gull and the most important characteristic (head pattern) was more consistent with Franklin's than Laughing Gull.

87-15

Tom Kent
5 Dec. 1987
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Hope this discussion is useful. The birding has been fairly dull in Ohio this fall as well. We had two male Rufous Hummingbirds and a fairly good flight of Sabine's Gulls and Red Phalaropes along Lake Erie. Otherwise, its been rather routine. By the way, I wonder where all the gulls are. The numbers along Lake Erie have been dismal all fall, even Ring-billeds which are normally incredibly abundant at this time of the year.

Sincerely,


Bruce Peterjohn

1. Species ? Laughing Gull 2. Number 1
 3. Location Hawkeye Wildlife Area, Johnson Co, IA
 4. Date: 26 June 1987 5. Time Bird Seen: ~ 10 AM to 10:05
 6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field):

Legs + Bill - dark but probably not black

Mantle - darkish grey

Wing Tips - good sized black dark patch rather sooty than black

I saw no white at very tip. And no white between dark and mantle

Top of head covered with a mottled hood, with a good bit of white around + in front of eye

Tail - white

(OVER)

7. Description of voice, if heard: -
 8. Description of behavior:
 9. Habitat - general: marshy backwaters of reservoir
 specific:
 10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8. Explain:
 11. Distance (how measured)? 20-50'
 12. Optical equipment: 7X35 binocs.
 13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
bright sun behind me
 14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
I have seen numerous gulls - both Franklin's + Laughing but most of my experience has been with adults + or in breeding or winter plumage.
 15. Other observers:
Tr Kent saw a gull ~~matching~~ that was likely the same bird about 6 hrs after I. He was unable to get close enough to make an identification
 16. Did the others agree with your identification?
 17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:
 18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
I consulted all std guides as my ~~interpretation~~ identification changed.
 19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 48 hrs from field notes made on the spot.

Signature: Richard Hollis Address: 3351 Lower W. Brand Rd

Date: 6/26/87 City, State: Iowa City, IA 52240

This bird flew past me + landed 50' away. I glanced at it. Made the description + moved on, figuring it was a Franklin's. Then I got to thinking: what if it was something else, as Franklin's are rare at that date. I looked at my field guides + realized that I was not sure if I could distinguish ~~from~~ Franklin's from Laughing Gulls in their last ^{summer} plummage before becoming adults.

I am not sure of the identification. At present I lean toward Laughing due to

1. lack of obvious white on wings
2. Size of dark patches @ wing tips
3. Dark color of mantle
4. The white tail rules out all the younger birds.