

Laughing Gull

9 Sep 1989

n. of Burlington, Des Moines Co., IA

Kent

photos by T. Kent; IBL 60:14, 61:85, Kent 1991

Record Number: 89-37

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Thomas H. Kent

PHOTOGRAPHS

T. H. Kent, P-0291

T. H. Kent, Cape Hatteras, NC, 27 Aug 1989, P-0379 [submitted for comparison]

LETTER

T. H. Kent, 27 Oct 1990

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:14

Records Committee: IBL 61:85

Photographs: IBL 61:30

Kent, T. H. 1991. Laughing Gulls in Des Moines County. IBL 61:29-32.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D: Good description of both birds.

A-D: Convincing description of first and second (?) year birds.

A-D: I would like to discuss these three records in July at our annual meeting. I have seen free flying/nesting Laughing Gulls in the aviary and outside the aviary at the Henry Dourly Zoo in Omaha, NE. I have no doubt that the three sightings here are Laughing Gulls but I would like to discuss the possible origin of these birds. Are there breeding populations (wild) elsewhere close to Iowa?

A-D: Nice birds to find and good descriptions.

A-D: Good description.

REVIEW OF PHOTOS (at meeting of 29 July 1990): Examination of 2 photos led to extensive discussion. The photos were very supportive of this species. A motion to change from A-D to A-P was not approved.

REVOTE (at meeting of 11 Nov 1990 with letter from T. H. Kent): 3 A-P, 4 A-D

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FRONT COVER: Ivory Gull, Red Rock Dam, Monroe County, 27 December 1990. Photo by Tim Schantz.

INSIDE BACK COVER: Editorial Staff, Subscription/Membership Information, Instructions to Authors, Officers, Board of Directors, Standing Committees.

BACK COVER: Meeting Dates, Report Deadlines, Birdline, Materials Available.

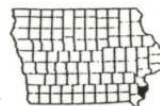
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## LAUGHING GULLS IN DES MOINES COUNTY

THOMAS H. KENT

On 9 September 1989, Dick Tetrault and I took his speed boat to the access on the Mississippi River 2 miles south and 5 miles east of Kingston in Des Moines County to look for a Royal Tern that had been reported there. This location is 6 miles above Lock and Dam 18, which is north of Burlington.



When we arrived, Louise Augustine of Chillicothe, Illinois, was there looking for the tern. We invited her to join us in the boat to look for the bird.

Between 9:30 and 11:15 a.m., we had several chances to study two Laughing gulls, one a juvenile and the other a one-year-old bird. They were first seen separately on sand bars on the Iowa side. Later they were together on the Illinois side. We approached to within about 40 yards in the boat and used 10 power binoculars.

The juvenile bird was on the water with Ring-billed Gulls. I recognized it immediately by its overall tan-brown color and from my recent experience with similar birds at Red Rock Reservoir and in North Carolina in late August. The bird was smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls (about 2/3). It had an overall tan-brown color with the light feather edging on the scapulars and wing coverts providing a scaly appearance. The forehead was lighter brown. The bill was dark, thinner, and of more uniform thickness than a ring-bill's bill, and slightly decurved at the tip. There were thin white upper and eye crescents. In flight I noted the white base to the tail (dark brown distally), thin white tip to the tail, white under tail with black outer tips, dark outer wing tips with tan brown inner wing and back, and thin white trailing edge to the wing.

The one-year-old bird was seen on a sand bar with Ring-billed Gulls and Caspian, Black, Forster's, and Common terns. It was smaller than the ring-bills and larger than the small terns. The shape and size were similar to the juvenile bird. I noted the thin black bill that drooped slightly at the tip. The head was shades of gray with more gray below and behind the eye. It did not have the sharp white and black appearance of a Franklin's Gull. The upper and lower eye rings appeared to meet posteriorly but not anteriorly. The underparts were very light gray with a grayer appearance to the sides of the lower neck and upper breast. The legs were dark. The back and wing coverts were medium gray, much darker than any ring-billed. In flight the wing tips were quite dark, and the rest of the wing and back were medium gray. The trailing edge of the upper wing was white. The tail was white with a full black subterminal band about 1 cm wide.

Later in the morning we observed the same two birds together on a sand bar about one mile down river on the Illinois side. The two were similar in size and shape, and we saw the same features described above at close range.

Juvenile Laughing Gulls are distinctive. I was able to pick the younger bird out quickly. When we first saw the one-year-old bird, we considered both Franklin's and Laughing gulls. A juvenile or first-winter Franklin's would not have uniform gray in the wing coverts. A first-summer or second-winter Franklin's Gull would not have a full tail band. The bill shape also favors Laughing Gull. The bird appeared to be in second-winter plumage, except for the tail band which fits better with first-summer plumage. I was impressed with the soft grayness of the bird and its similarity to the birds that I had photographed in North Carolina two weeks earlier.

Laughing Gull was very rare at inland Midwestern locations until the 1960s, but has been on the increase since then. In Ohio, Laughing Gull is a rare spring and casual fall visitor along Lake Erie (Peterjohn 1989). A few summer on Lake Erie, and one female laid eggs. In Michigan, it is considered regular in spring and irregular in summer and fall (Payne 1983). It is listed as very rare in northern, and accidental in central Indiana (Keller et al. 1986). In Illinois, it is a rare spring and fall migrant with some summering in north and central Illinois (Bohlen 1989). In 1982, the Wisconsin Records Committee discarded most of the state's old records of Laughing Gulls because of identification problems (W. S. O. Records Committee 1984), but the pattern of records since then is similar to other Great Lakes states. In Minnesota, it is considered casual based on seven May to August records, five of which are from the Duluth area (Janssen 1987). There are very few records from North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. Laughing Gulls are listed as casual in Missouri (Easterla et al. 1986).

The pattern of occurrence of Laughing Gulls in the Midwest can be summarized as follows: In spring a few adults regularly migrate up the Mississippi River with most ending up on the Great Lakes; some of these are seen in summer. A few second-year birds have been described in spring and summer. Fewer Laughing Gulls are seen in fall than spring; some fall birds may be adults that migrated north in spring, but the presence of juveniles suggests that there is some northward post-breeding migration. Juveniles have been noted in August in Illinois (Bohlen 1989), and juvenile and first-winter birds have been noted in late summer and fall in Kentucky (Monroe, et al. 1988).

Adult Laughing Gulls may be confused with second summer Franklin's Gulls (Goetz 1983, W. S. O. Records Committee 1984), mainly because they may lack the white bar that separates the gray of the proximal wing from the black-and-white wing tip. Juvenile Laughing Gulls are quite distinctive because of their overall brown color, white at the base of the tail and trailing edge of the wing, and black primaries and secondary bar. Second-year Laughing Gulls are not well illustrated in standard sources; identification must be based on overall size, shape, and bill differences from Franklin's Gull and detailed descriptions of plumages such as those in Grant (1986). It is worth noting that Franklin's Gull always has white outer tail feathers, never a complete tail band as seen on the second-year Laughing Gull in Des Moines County. As Peterjohn points out, second-year Laughing Gulls have variably grayish heads and lack the half-hooded appearance of Franklin's Gull (Kent 1988).

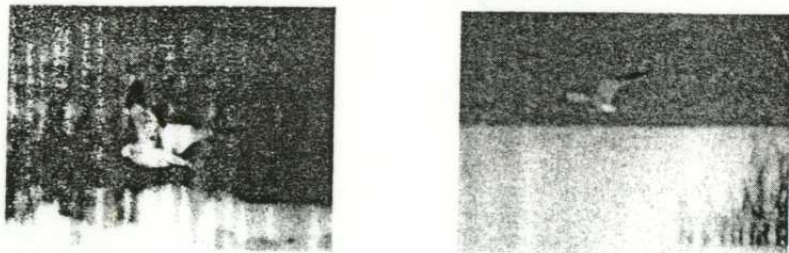


Figure 1. Two views of juvenile Laughing Gull in Des Moines County on 9 September 1989. The overall light brown gull has all black primaries and primary coverts (outer wing), barely visible black tail band and secondary bar, and white rump and trailing edge to secondaries.

Based on occurrence in surrounding states, Iowa should have some Laughing Gull records. It is interesting that DuMont (1933) dismissed early references to this species by Anderson (1907) on the basis of the possibility of confusion with first-year Franklin's Gull, and Stiles (1941) recognized that the large (almost as large as a Ring-billed Gull) black-headed gull that he saw at Lake Manawa on 25 March 1941 might not be accepted as a first state record for the same reason and because he did not collect it. A record from Coralville Reservoir on 26 March 1977 (Halmi 1977) was initially accepted (Dinsmore et al. 1984), but later not accepted based on the possible confusion with first-spring Franklin's Gull (Kent 1986). Both of these birds would have been early for Laughing Gull, which is usually found in the Midwest from late April to October, but has been recorded from February to December. Three other recent Iowa reports of Laughing Gull have not been accepted because they might have been first-summer Franklin's Gulls (Silcock and Kent 1984, Kent 1988). There are two Illinois Laughing Gull records that could also have been in Iowa: an adult at New Boston seen by Bohlen on 19 May 1971 (Bohlen 1978) and four adults and an immature at Nauvoo on 12 June 1971 (Kleen and Bush 1971).

The three juveniles and one second-year bird seen in the fall of 1989 provide the first accepted records for Iowa. The other juveniles were first seen at Red Rock Reservoir on 19 August 1989 and at IPL Ponds on 27 August 1989 (Bendorf 1989). I thought that the occurrence of three juvenile Laughing Gulls in Iowa could be due to a weather pattern and would be reflected by similar occurrence throughout the Midwest; however, the seasonal reports in American Birds for the fall of 1989 do not indicate increased numbers, and the regional editors do not even indicate whether the few birds seen were juveniles or adults.

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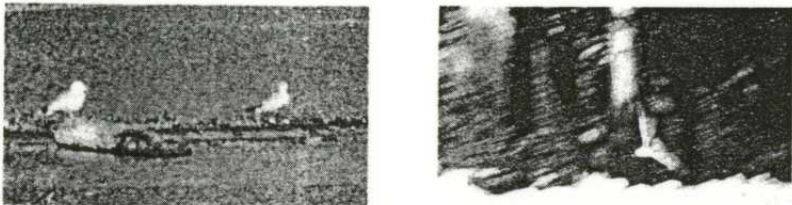


Figure 2. Two views of juvenile Laughing Gull at Red Rock Reservoir on 23 August 1989. The standing bird is smaller, slimmer, and smaller headed than the nearby Ring-billed Gull. The bird in flight shows the light brown inner wing and back, the dark outer wing and subterminal tail band, and the white rump and trailing edge to the wing.

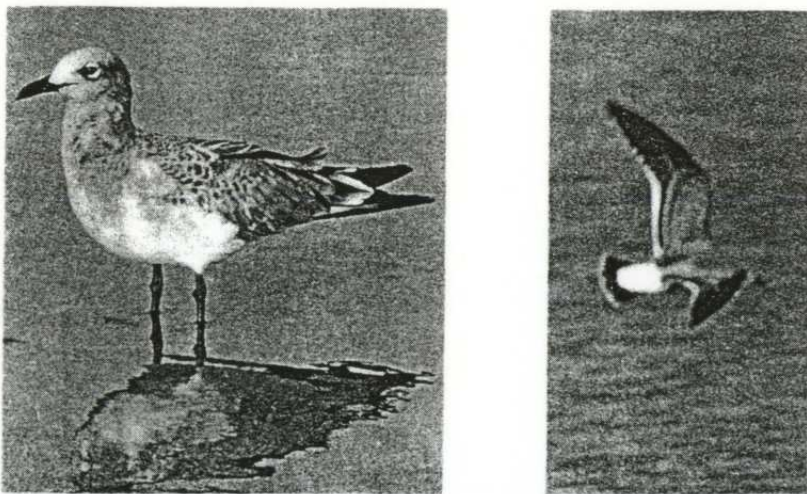


Figure 3. Two views of juvenile Laughing Gulls taken in North Carolina on 27 August 1989 illustrate the features of the same-aged birds in better detail.

## CATALOG OF BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD HOSTS FROM IOWA--AN UPDATE

PETER E. LOWTHER

Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) are conspicuous components of Iowa's breeding bird populations. On average, Breeding Bird Surveys in Iowa count 20.5 cowbirds (out of 905 individuals of 78 passerine species; Robbins et al. 1986). Cowbirds are brood parasites; they lay their eggs in the nests of other species. Cowbird breeding behavior, therefore, affects many of the passerine species that nest in Iowa. The total impact of brood parasitism on these bird populations depends both on host abundance and cowbirds' host preferences.

My earlier paper on cowbird hosts in Iowa (Lowther 1985) provided a list of 60 species that have been recorded as hosts of the Brown-headed Cowbird in Iowa. That list was based on the compilations by Herbert Friedmann (Friedmann 1963, Friedmann et al. 1977) as a primary summary of much of the literature, searches through publications of Iowa ornithology, and from data available in the collections of several museums. I provide here an update and summary of this information to give more current understanding to cowbird-host interactions within the state. Friedmann and Kiff (1985), published after my earlier Iowa list, is the most recent general catalog of cowbird hosts and lists 220 species as having been parasitized by Brown-headed Cowbirds. Of these, 144 species have been recorded as actually rearing cowbird young.

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data provide indices of species' abundances (note cautions in Bystrak 1981) that suggest which hosts are important to cowbirds in Iowa. If species that are regularly and commonly parasitized are subjectively classified as "good" hosts, then Iowa has 31 "good" host species with 440 counted per BBS route. Seven species make up 85% of these "good" hosts (Dinsmore 1981, Robbins et al. 1986): Red-winged Blackbird, 173.5 birds/BBS route; Western Meadowlark, 69.0; Dickcissel, 62.1; Common Yellowthroat, 25.0; Vesper Sparrow, 17.3; Song Sparrow, 13.5; and Eastern Meadowlark, 14.8.

### RESULTS

#### NEST CARD RECORDS

Iowa Nest Card program data currently provide 414 records of parasitized nests (up from the 152 nest records available to me in 1985). Ten species have more than 10 records of parasitized nests from Iowa: Red-winged Blackbird, 167; Northern Cardinal, 47; Indigo Bunting, 30; Vesper Sparrow, 19; Dickcissel, 18; Rose-breasted Grosbeak, 16; Field Sparrow, 16; Common Yellowthroat, 12; Western Meadowlark, 12; and Grasshopper Sparrow, 11. Five of these species are common also on BBS routes, another indication that common species are commonly parasitized.

#### NEWLY REPORTED HOSTS

Four species, listed below, have moved from my appendix list (of species which have been recorded as cowbird hosts elsewhere, but have not yet been recorded as cowbird hosts in Iowa) to the list of recorded hosts:

## ANALYSIS OF JUVENILE LAUGHING GULL PHOTOS

T. H. Kent, 27 October 1990

Two records of juvenile Laughing Gulls (89-35, 89-37) were accepted by the I.O.U. Records Committee, but the photos were not considered diagnostic. Although the photos are not ideal, I believe that they demonstrate diagnostic features of juvenile Laugh Gulls. There are two color prints of each bird. Bird #1 was photographed at Red Rock Reservoir on 23 August 1989 and bird #2 was photographed on Pool 18 in Des Moines County on 9 September 1989.

I will present a general analysis of these photos and then a detailed analysis comparing these photos with (1) photos I took of juvenile Laughing Gulls at Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, on 27 August 1989 and (2) descriptions of juvenile Ring-billed, Mew, Franklin's, and Laughing gulls. The photos are mounted on attached sheets and the descriptions are verbatim from Harrison's *Seabirds* (H) and Grant's *Gulls* (G).

## GENERAL ANALYSIS

The photographs show birds with dark wing tips, light brown mantle, white trailing edge to wing, and white tail with black subterminal band and white tip.

Bird #1 is smaller, slimmer, and smaller headed than the Ring-billed Gull next to it. Assuming acceptance of the other gull as a Ring-billed, this bird is not one of the large gulls. Furthermore, it is a juvenile because all gulls of Ring-billed size or smaller show gray in the mantle by first winter. If the reference gull were a Herring (it isn't), Bird #1 would still be smaller than any of the four-year gulls with the possible exception of California Gull. Although several four-year gulls (California, Herring, Thayer's, Lesser Black-backed, Western, Glaucous-winged) carry an overall brown pattern into the first winter, none have a clean-cut white base to the tail. Most of the two-year gulls (Bonaparte's, Common Black-headed, Ross', Sabine's gulls and kittiwakes) and a small three-year gull (Little Gull) have a striking black and white appearance starting with juvenile plumage. Adult Heermann's Gull has a white tail with black subterminal band and white trailing edge to the inner wing, but it is an overall gray to black bird. The large white-winged and black-winged gulls never show a sharply defined black wing tip with brown inner wing or black-and-white tail pattern as seen in Bird #1. This leaves only a few juvenile gulls (Franklin's, Mew/Common, and Ring-billed) to be eliminated.

The size of Bird #2 is not so well defined, but the body does not appear larger than the Ring-billed Gulls and Caspian Terns that are standing some distance behind it. The upper wing pattern is similar to Bird #1, although the lighting and exposure differ somewhat. The white tail, underwing pattern, and brown wash across the breast can be seen. All of the same gulls discussed above can be eliminated for the reasons given.

Below I present a description of each of the juvenile contenders by anatomic part and compare these with descriptions of Laughing Gull and with photos of the birds in question and Laughing Gulls that I photographed in North Carolina between the time of the two sightings. I don't recall ever seeing juvenile Mew, Ring-billed, or Franklin's gulls. These species are well into first-winter plumage when we begin to see them in fall. I remember studying first-winter Franklin's Gulls at Clear Lake on 15 September 1989 and first-winter Ring-billed Gulls on a boat ride on West Okobojo on 16 September 1989. The gray in the mantle of both species easily separates them from juveniles.

It is somewhat difficult to get a clear idea of the timing of molt from juvenile to first-winter plumage. The following are quotes from Bent's *Life Histories of North American Gulls and Terns*.

Ring-billed: "Except for a molt of some body plumage, the first winter plumage is a continuation of the juvenile; the buffy edgings fade out to white and wear away; many new feathers, partially 'gull gray' with dusky markings, come in on the back; and the dusky markings fade and wear away or are replaced by white on the breast and head during winter."

Franklin's: "The postjuvinal molt begins early in September and by November or December the first-winter plumage is fully acquired by partial molt, which involves everything but the wings and tail."

Laughing: "As the season advances [referring to juvenile plumage] buffy edgings on the upper parts

wear away and fade out to whitish. A gradual postjuvenile molt also takes place during the fall and winter with the growth of new 'gull gray' feathers in the back and new white feathers in the head, neck, and breast."

Note that the two photographs of standing juvenile Laughing Gulls taken in North Carolina show slightly different plumages on the same date. One has the scaly edgings on wing typical of a juvenile and the other has worn edgings and early appearance of gray feathers in the mantle.

From the above considerations, including my own observations, Laughing Gulls appear to retain a more juvenile appearance longer into the fall than Franklin's and Ringed-billed gulls. Although I present plumage details below, Franklin's Gull is rather easily eliminated because it is white below and has a half-hood from the start. Ring-billed Gull is also whiter beneath and less uniformly marked above than Laughing Gull. Mew gull is quite similar to Ring-billed, and the possibility of seeing a juvenile in Iowa seems remote.

## HEAD

### *Juv. Ring-billed*

H: Mostly dull white crown streaked dull brown, becoming spotted on nape and hindneck; eye crescent dusky.

G: not described

### *Juv. Mew*

H: Dense grey-brown streaks form partial hood; forehead, chin, and throat white.

G: Forehead white, throat and nape whitish. Ear coverts and crown densely streaked grey-brown, sometimes forming ill-defined partial hood. Thin white crescents above and below eye and dusky eye-crescent.

### *Juv. Franklin's*

H: Partial dark brown hood; forehead, chin, and crescents white.

G: Forehead, lores, chin, and crescents above and below eye whitish. Eye-crescent, ear-coverts, rear crown, and nape mainly dark grey-brown, more streaked on crown and nape, forming clear-cut half-hood.

### *Juv. Laughing*

H: Brownish-white, darkest on lores, ear-coverts, and hindcrown; forehead, throat, and crescents above and below eye whitish.

G: Mainly grey-brown, paler on forehead, lores, chin and throat, and often darker on rear ear-coverts, rear crown, and nape. Eye-crescent blackish, and thin white crescents above and below eye (not joining at rear), less prominent than on subsequent plumages.

### *Bird #1*

Brownish head, whiter on forehead and throat.

### *Bird #2*

Light brown, whiter between eye and bill.

### *NC juv. Laughing*

Light brown, whiter on forehead and lores, darker behind eye and on nape. White eye crescents almost meet in rear.

### *Comment*

The detail in the photos is not good, but the pattern of lighter throat and forehead is seen. Ring-billed would be lighter on crown and more streaked. Mew might show a half-hood and might be more contrasty. Franklin's would show a half hood.

## UNDERPARTS

### *Juv. Ring-billed*

H: Mostly dull white; throat and breast spotted with brown (from hindneck), crescentic bars on sides

of breast, flanks and undertail coverts.

G: Lower hindneck, breast (especially breast-sides) and flanks more coarsely marked with darker gray brown, usually with coarser pattern of chevrons, crescentic markings or complex barring especially on breast-sides and flanks.

*Juv. Mew*

H: Underparts white; breast, flanks, and undertail coverts mottled or barred brownish-grey.

G: Lower hindneck, flanks, and often defined broad breast band uniform or mottled grey-brown. Belly and vent white.

*Juv. Franklin's*

H: whitish.

G: Underparts and rump white, breast-sides faintly washed brown.

*Juv. Laughing*

H: Upper breast and flanks grayish-brown; remainder white.

G: Hindneck, broad breast band, and flanks uniformly gray-brown. Belly, vent, and rump dull white.

*Bird #1*

On standing bird, the hindneck and breast appear gray-brown.

*Bird #2*

On view from below, the breast appears gray-brown, and belly and vent white.

*NC juv. Laughing*

Broad gray-brown breast band and hindneck with white belly.

*Comment*

The underparts of a Franklin's Gull should be whiter than the birds in question. The coloration of the underparts is more uniform and less heavily marked than would be expected for a Ring-billed. Mew Gull could appear similar to the photo.

## UPPERPARTS

*Juv. Ring-billed*

H: Mostly clove-brown with broad buff edges imparting variegated pattern; rump and uppertail coverts white, spotted with brown.

G: Mantle and scapulars gray-brown, individual feathers with dark subterminal crescents and pale fringes forming more complex pattern than Common Gull.

*Juv. Mew*

H: Mantle and back buff, fringed paler; rump and uppertail coverts white with dark chevrons.

G: Mantle and scapulars buff, with neat pale feather fringes giving a scaly pattern most prominent on scapulars. Rump and uppertail- and undertail-coverts white, with dark arrowhead markings or bars.

*Juv. Franklin's*

H: Saddle brownish fringed gray, giving scaly pattern; rump white.

G: Hindneck, mantle, scapulars, and back brownish; scapulars fringed pale giving indistinct scaly pattern.

*Juv. Laughing*

H: Upperparts mostly dull brown fringed paler, imparting scaly appearance; rump white.

G: Mantle and scapulars brown, with pale buff feather fringes giving scaly appearance, most prominent on scapulars. Back uniform greyish.

*Bird #1*

Light brown back and scapulars with sharp contrast with white upper tail coverts seen in flying bird.

*Bird #2*

Mantle light brown with sharp contrast with white upper tail coverts.

*NC juv. Laughing*

Mantle light brown with sharp contrast with white upper tail coverts.

*Comment*

The birds in question match the North Carolina birds. From the description, Franklin's might be grayer and Ring-billed more marked. Mew and Ring-billed gulls have markings in the uppertail coverts compared to the pure white of Birds #1 and #2. The lack of scaly appearance could be due to wear or distance.

## UPPERWING

*Juv. Ring-billed*

H: Outer 4-5 primaries, alula, and most of primary coverts blackish-brown; inner most primaries pale grey, subterminally black, decreasing in extent inwards; secondaries blackish-brown, fringes buff white. Coverts mostly pale grey except for brownish carpal and diagonal bar; tertials blackish-brown, narrowly edged buff.

G: Dark areas on outer wing generally blacker [than Common Gull], and more defined and less extensive on inner primaries: inner primaries and midwing panel basically paler grey, giving more contrasting upper wing pattern than on Common Gull. Greater coverts pale grey with usually obvious neat dark markings or bars, especially on innermost, not uniform grey-brown as on Common Gull. Carpal bar darker, less brown, and tip of dark central area of individual median and lesser coverts (especially innermost) pointed, not rounded as on Common Gull. Tertials and adjacent greater coverts darker than Common Gull, with thinner pale fringes on average.

*Juv. Mew*

H: Outer 3-5 primaries, most of primary-coverts and alula blackish-brown, inner primaries grey-brown on outer webs with subterminal blackish tips; secondaries blackish-brown, tipped white. Greater coverts grey-brown, remainder light brown.

G: Carpal-bar brown, with rounded brown feather centres and pale fringes, and tertials with broad whitish fringe and pointed dark centre. Greater coverts (except three or four innermost) uniform pale grey-brown, forming pale midwing panel. Outer greater primary coverts and outer three to five primaries wholly blackish-brown except for pale fringes at tips: dull grey on outer webs increasing in extent (and subterminal blackish areas decreasing) from base of 5th or 6th primary inwards, forming pale division between outer primaries and secondary bar.

*Juv. Franklin's*

H: Outer primaries and their coverts black, decreasing in extent inwards to subterminal band on 6th or 7th, innermost greyer; secondaries dark grey-brown with darker centres and white tips which, with tips of inner primaries, form white trailing edge; remaining coverts brownish-grey with paler fringes.

G: Carpal-bar brownish with pale fringes. Greater coverts mainly uniform brownish grey. Secondaries grey-brown with blackish centers (forming secondary bar) and prominent white tips forming white trailing edge to inner wing. Outer primaries, their coverts, and alula mainly black, with grey on outer webs increasing inwards from 3rd or 4th, and black decreasing to subterminal band on 6th or 7th. Small white tips on outer primaries increasing in size inwards to 5th or 6th, remainder with prominent white fringes at tips.

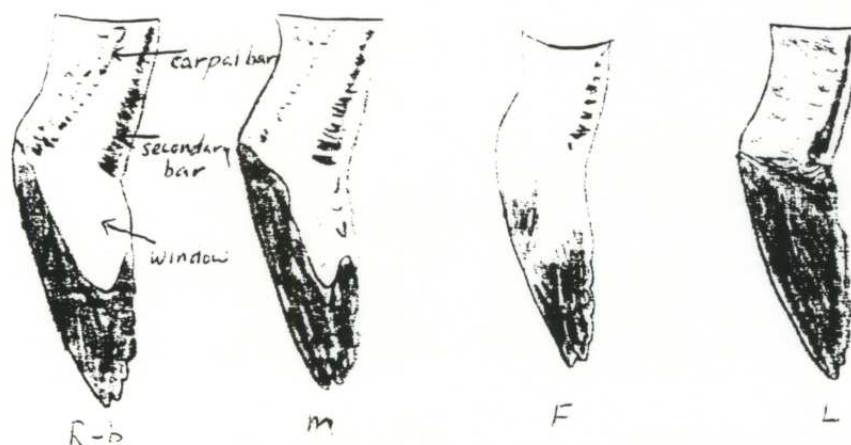
*Juv. Laughing*

H: Primaries, their coverts, and alula mostly dull blackish brown; secondaries blackish, fringed and tipped white; remaining coverts similar to upperparts.

G: Lesser and median coverts and tertials mainly brown like scapulars, with fine pale buff fringes; greater coverts grey-brown with whitish fringes. Secondaries black with fine white edges and broad white tips. Outer primaries and coverts wholly blackish, with thin white fringes at tips from



3rd to 5th inwards, and dull grey on outer and inner webs increasing from 4th to 6th in wards.



Wing pattern of first-winter Ring-billed, Mew, Franklin's, and Laughing gulls traced from drawings in Grant. Pattern (but not color) of first-winter birds is similar to juveniles. Note differences in the window, carpal bar, and darkness of secondary coverts.

#### Bird #1

Primaries and primary coverts black. Secondary coverts light brown. White trailing edge to secondaries and inner primaries (double image produced by camera movement). Secondary bar looks darker (area between double image of white trailing edge).

#### Bird #2

Primaries and primary coverts black. Secondary coverts light brown. White trailing edge to secondaries and inner primaries. Thinner dark secondary bar.

#### NC juv. Laughing

Primaries and primary coverts nearly black with slight white edge to inner primaries and slight brown edge to inner greater primary coverts. Secondary coverts light brown with slight lighter brown edge; thin black secondaries (secondary bar) with slightly wider prominent white trailing edge.

#### Comment

The black outer wing and light brown inner wing with thin dark secondaries and wider white trailing edge match Laughing Gull. Ring-billed, Mew, and Franklin's all have light inner primaries producing a window. Ring-billed have a dark carpal bar and more flecked appearance. Mew and Franklin's should also show a carpal bar. Franklin's has a lighter inner wing and white tips to outer primaries which I think could be seen in the photos if the birds were Franklin's.

## UNDERWING

#### Juv. Ring-billed

H: Underwing off-white, streaked brown on coverts and axillaries, outer primaries and secondaries blackish

G: Pattern on underwing coverts similar [to Common Gull], but marking perhaps darker on average, but some only faintly marked.

#### Juv. Mew

H: Underwing whitish, streaked brown.

G: Underwing whitish, axillaries and most coverts with dark tips, forming lines.

*Juv. Franklin's*

H: Underwing mainly greyish-white, tip smudgy black.

G: Greater under primary coverts prominently marked with dusky, remainder of underwing coverts mainly white.

*Juv. Laughing*

H: Underwing whitish with smudgy blackish tip and subterminal trailing edge; coverts and axillaries tipped and streaked brown (thus much darker than in smaller Franklin's, appearing predominantly dark in field).

G: Underwing coverts mainly dull white, with dusky markings especially on tips of axillaries forming prominent dark diagonal bar which often extends across median and lesser underwing coverts.

*Bird #1*

Not seen in photos.

*Bird #2*

Primaries and underwing primary coverts black. Rest of underwing light gray except for smudged dark inner secondaries subterminally and dark axillary bar.

*NC juv. Laughing*

Not shown in photos.

*Comment*

The underwing on bird #2 shows the dark tip (with white indent centrally similar to the drawing in Grant) and dark secondaries with light trailing edge and dark axillary bar. Ring-billed might show more markings. Mew and Franklin's should appear whiter with little dark at tip. Although the references are not very clear, I believe that Laughing Gull shows a more extensive black wing tip than the other species, especially Franklin's. The axillary bar is interesting.

## TAIL

*Juv. Ring-billed*

H: Mostly white; blackish subterminal band has mottled edges, particularly on outer feathers above band.

G: Subterminal band rarely solid black and clear-cut as on Common Gull, but usually broken by pale mottling of highly variable pattern: remainder of tail often shaded with grey of variable pattern. Tail pattern of Ring-billed Gulls highly variable, with any two individuals rarely identical, unlike comparatively standard pattern of Common Gull. Uppertail- and undertail-coverts more strongly barred on average.

*Juv. Mew*

H: White with broad, blackish, sharply defined subterminal band.

G: White, typically clear-cut, broad, solidly blackish-brown subterminal band: outer pair of feathers often with dark only on inner webs or occasionally all-white. Sometimes, blackish-brown, occasionally greyish, extends up the side of each feather, giving a notched or diffuse leading edge to the tail band.

*Juv. Franklin's*

H: Centre pale grey with black subterminal band, widest in centre; base, outer feathers, and extreme tip white.

G: Mainly pale grey, with black subterminal band of even width or slightly broader at center, not extending to outer pair of feathers, which are all-white.

*Juv. Laughing*

H: Whitish with complete blackish terminal band; fringe white.

G: Outer webs dull grey, inner webs whitish, with broad black subterminal band always extending to outer pair of feathers; thin white terminal fringe.



Upper tail pattern of Ring-billed, Mew, Franklin's, and Laughing gulls traced from Grant.

*Bird #1*

Proximal two-thirds white. Black subterminal band extends across tail and appears narrower centrally. Tip white.

*Bird #2*

White upper tail with suggestion of black tip (not sharp in photo). Undertail appears dark but not well shown.

*NC juv. Laughing*

Proximal two-thirds of upper tail to base of wing pure white. Black subterminal band extends to outer feathers. Thin pure white trailing edge. Undertail not seen.

*Comment*

Both birds show a pure white proximal tail, and the dark tail band with white fringe is well seen in Bird #1. Ring-billed has a browner less demarcated band and streaked tail coverts. Mew would appear similar except that markings in upper tail coverts should be evident. Franklin's has a thinner band which is wider centrally and white on the edges; the grayness proximally might show in photos.

## BAREPARTS

*Juv. Ring-billed*

H: Iris brown. Bill pink, subterminally black, tip white. Legs/feet flesh pink.

G: Iris dark brown. Bill blackish often with flesh-pink base and sometimes tiny whitish mark at extreme tip. Legs flesh pink.

*Juv. Mew*

H: Bill pink, tip black, legs flesh-pink.

G: Iris dark brown. Bill blackish with diffuse dull flesh, flesh-pink or greyish-flesh base sometimes confined to lower mandible. Leg-color as bill-base.

*Juv. Franklin's*

H: Bill and legs blackish.

G: Bill blackish, sometimes shade paler at base. Legs blackish.

*Juv. Laughing*

H: Bill/legs blackish.

G: Iris dark. Bill black, often with some dull brown at base. Legs blackish or dull brown.

*Bird #1*

Eye, bill and legs appear dark compared to adjacent Ring-billed Gull.

*Bird #2*

Bill and eye appear dark.

*NC juv. Laughing*

Eye, bill, legs black.

*Comment*

The bare parts appear black in both birds, but are not seen well enough to be of much help. The bill on Bird #1 appears much smaller and thinner than the adjacent Ring-billed Gull. Possibly the pinkish bill and feet of Ring-billed or Mew gulls would be evident in photos of this quality.

**SUMMARY**

Juvenile Laughing Gull is a quite distinctive bird as illustrated in the photos from North Carolina. The overall brown color with white tail, black subterminal tail band, black outer wing including all primaries and their coverts, and white trailing edge to the wing are seen in the photos of both birds in question. The combination of features as well as other details described above do not fit any other species or any other age.



Laughing Gull P-0291  
Mississippi Pool 18, Des Moi Co  
09 Sep 1989 T. H. Kent

89-37

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89-37

## DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Laughing Gull (1 juvenile, 1 second-year), 9 September 1989,  
Mississippi River, 2 south and 5 east of Kingston, Des Moines  
Co., Iowa.

Observer: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246  
Other observers: Dick Tetrault (Iowa City), Louise Augustine  
(Chillicothe, IL)

Time: several sightings between 9:30 and 11:15 a.m.

Habitat: Mississippi River several miles above dam.

Description: The juvenile bird was on the water with Ring-billed Gulls. I recognized it immediately by its overall tan-brown color and from my recent experience with similar birds at Red Rock Res. and in North Carolina in late August. The bird was smaller than Ring-billed Gulls (about 2/3). It had an overall tan-brown color with edging on the scapulars and wing coverts providing a scaly appearance. The forehead was lighter. The bill was dark, thinner and more uniform than ring-bill's bill, and slightly decurved at tip. There were thin white upper and lower eye cups. In flight I noted the white base to the tail, thin white tip to the tail, white under tail with black outer tips, dark outer wing tips with tan brown inner wing and back, thin white trailing edge to the wing.

The second-year bird was seen on a sand bar with Ring-billed Gulls and Caspian, Black, Forster's, and Common Terns. It was smaller than the ring-bills and larger than the small terns. The shape and size were similar to the juvenile bird. I noted the thin black bill that drooped slightly at the tip. The head was shades of gray with more gray below and behind the eye. It did not have the sharp white and black appearance of a Franklin's Gull. The upper and lower eye cups appeared to meet posteriorly but not anteriorly. The underparts were very light gray with a grayer appearance to the sides of the lower neck and upper breast. The legs were dark. The back and wing coverts were medium gray, much darker than any ring-bill. In flight the wing tips were quite dark and the rest of the wing and back were medium gray. The trailing edge of the upper wing was white. The tail was white with a full black subterminal band about 1-cm wide.

Later in the morning we observed the same two birds together on a sand bar about one mile down river on the Illinois side. Their size and shape were similar to each other and we saw the same features described above at close range.

Song: not heard.

Behavior: sitting, swimming, flying.

Conditions: about 40 yards; overcast; 10x binocular from boat.

Similar species: The juvenile bird is distinctive and I was able to pick it out quickly. When we first saw the second-year bird, we considered both Franklin's and Laughing gulls. A juvenile or first-winter Franklin's would not have uniform gray in the wing coverts. A second-summer or second-winter Franklin's Gull would not have a full tail band. The bill shape also favors Laughing Gull. The bird appears to be in second-winter plumage, except for the tail band which fits better with first-summer plumage. I was impressed with the

soft grayness of the bird and its similarity the birds I photographed recently in North Carolina.

Agreement: yes

Previous experience: Studied and photographed Laughing Gulls in North Carolina in late August of this year.

References/time used: Used NGS guide after viewing and Grant while for comparing similar species.

Time of notes/typed: notes made 3 hours after sighting; report typed two days later.