

Laughing Gull                      2nd year                      Record Number: 91-31  
6 Aug 1991    Classification: A-D  
Red Rock Res., Marion Co., IA  
\*S. Dinsmore  
to 11 Aug; IBL 62:70, Dinsmore et al. 1995

DOCUMENTATION

Stephen J. Dinsmore, 2600 Glen Burnie, Raleigh, NC 37607. This documentation is of 2 birds. The first-year bird is part of record 91-12. The second-year bird is this record.

REFERENCES

Field Reports: none  
Records Committee: 62:70  
Dinsmore, S. J., A. Johnson, and M. Proescholdt. 1995. Laughing Gulls at Red Rock Reservoir. Iowa Bird Life 65:20-21.

VOTE: 1 A-P, 6 A-D

A-D, The long hooked bill with noticeable gonys, longer wings proportionally than Franklin's Gull present, slimmer size than Ring-billed Gulls present, and pale brown rump are multiple diagnostic characteristics that make this ID of a first/year Laughing Gull acceptable beyond reasonable doubt. Assuming the size and bill structure are the same as above, the dark gray mantle and white face and nape leads me to agree that the second gull is a moulting second summer Laughing Gull.

A-D, Good details and descriptions are provided for two different Laughing Gulls.

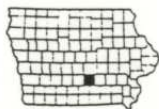
Sioux City; \*Maridel Jackson (MJ), Ankeny; Ann M. Johnson (AMJ), Norwalk; Thomas N. Johnson (TNJ), Mystic; Matthew C. Kenne (MCK), Algona; Thomas H. Kent (THK), Iowa City; Bob Livermore (BL), \*Francis L. Moore (FLM), Waterloo; Sioux City; Babs K. Padelford and Loren J. Padelford (BKP/LJP), Bellevue, NE; Marietta A. Petersen (MAP), Walnut; Peter C. Petersen (PCP), Davenport; Don Poggensee (DP), Ida Grove; Beth Proescholdt (BPr), Liscomb; Mark Proescholdt (MP), Liscomb; Lee A. Schoenewe (LAS), Spencer; \*W. Ross Silcock (WRS), Tabor; Jim Sinclair (JSi), Indianola; Dale Stone (DS), Lake City; Ed Thelen (ET), Spirit Lake; John Van Dyk (JV), Sioux Center; Wendy VanDeWall (WV), Ankeny; \*Harold W. White (HWW), Estherville; and Hank Zaletel, (HZ), Colo.

211 Richards Street, Iowa City, IA

## LAUGHING GULLS AT RED ROCK RESERVOIR

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE, ANN JOHNSON, AND MARK PROESCHOLDT

On 16 July 1991 Tim Schantz found a juvenile Laughing Gull at Red Rock Reservoir in Marion County. The bird was with a large flock of Ring-billed and Franklin's gulls at the Whitebreast Cove on the south side of the reservoir. On 6 August, Steve Dinsmore found another Laughing Gull, this one a second-summer bird, in the same area. Both birds remained in the area through at least 11 August. The following descriptions were written from our notes and detailed notes submitted by several other observers.



The juvenile bird was relatively easy to pick out from the other gulls by virtue of its body shape and dark appearance. With its long wing extension, it was just slightly shorter than the nearby Ring-billed Gulls, but its slimmer build and finer features gave it a generally smaller look. The head and neck were much more delicate, giving the bird more of a gentle "phalarope-look" as opposed to the "self-assured" perception of our more common gulls.

The overall color of the bird was dark brown. The bill was dark, about three-fourths the length of the head, and showed an obvious gonys. Compared to a Franklin's Gull, this bird had a longer, thicker bill. The eye was dark, with faint white crescents above and below the eye. The head, neck, and breast were dark brown, except for a lighter area in the center of the breast and a pale area around the base of the bill. The belly and vent were white. The mantle was also dark brown, but darker than the breast. There was a small, light gray area on the upper mantle, probably an indication that the bird was molting into first-winter plumage. When perched, the wings appeared dark brown, gradually becoming black towards the wingtip. The wing coverts were edged in lighter feathers, creating a scalloped look. The wingtips extended well beyond the tail when the bird was perched. In flight, the primaries and secondaries were black and the wing coverts were dark brown. The underwing was white. Tail pattern was as follows: rump pale brown, white uppertail, and a broad, black terminal tail band. There was no evidence of the black hood typical of adult birds in basic plumage. The legs were black and nearly the length of those of a Ring-billed Gull. Separation from Franklin's Gull was based on size, longer wings, longer and more strongly hooked bill, proportionately longer legs, flatter crown, overall darker brown color, and wing and tail pattern.

The second-summer bird was with a large gull flock, mostly Ring-billed Gulls, but also included several Franklin's Gulls and the juvenile Laughing Gull. This bird was similar to the juvenile bird in size and structure. The bill was black, and of similar dimensions to the bill of the juvenile bird. The head, neck, underparts, and undertail were white, except for a pale gray area on the nape that almost connected the eyes. This bird also showed faint white eye crescents that were broken in front of and behind the eye. The mantle was dark gray, slightly darker than the mantle of a Ring-billed Gull. In flight, the outer primaries, and most of the inner ones, were black. The tail was white except for a black terminal band that was broken in the middle. The legs appeared dark. The bird was clearly in heavy molt, as evidenced by the worn flight feathers and rectrices. On the basis of these field marks, the bird was probably molting from second-summer to second-winter plumage.

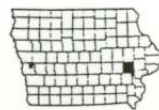
The Laughing Gulls were last seen together on 11 August. These are the fifth and sixth records of Laughing Gull for Iowa, all since 1989. The other records include single juvenile birds at Red Rock Reservoir, Marion County on 19-26 August 1989, Midwest Power Ponds, Pottawattamie County on 27 August 1989, and at Saylorville Reservoir, Polk County on 15 July 1991, a juvenile and a second-winter bird north of Burlington, Des Moines County on 9 September 1989 (Kent, T. H. 1991. *Iowa Bird Life* 61:29-32, Bendorf and Kent 1991, *Iowa Bird Life* 61:83-87), and an adult in breeding plumage at Saylorville Reservoir, Polk County on 13 April 1990 (Bendorf 1992 *Iowa Bird Life* 62:21-23). Based on these records, it seems that Laughing Gulls are more frequent vagrants to Iowa than previously thought. More thorough checks of gull flocks at the large reservoirs and along the Mississippi River in late summer might produce more sightings of this species.

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## WESTERN Tanager IN EASTERN IOWA

DAVID L. DANKERT

I arrived at Swan Lake at about 10:45 a.m. on 25 April 1994. Swan Lake is northwest of North Liberty in Johnson County and is in the Hawkeye Wildlife Area at Coralville Reservoir.



After viewing the lake for birds, I drove to the west end of the lake and found a flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers feeding

in a small stand of trees. I also noticed a larger bird perched in the top of one of these trees. This bird was about 25 feet away and facing me. With the sun behind me providing good viewing conditions, I noted a brilliant red head and yellow breast, and knew that I was looking at a bird that was unusual in Iowa.

With my adrenaline flowing, I quickly trained my binoculars on the bird, absorbing any details that the strong, windy conditions would allow. I saw a red forehead, chin, and throat, and the red extended into the upper breast. The remainder of the underparts were yellow. Because the bird was directly facing me, I could not see the upper parts of its wings and body. After a brief but exciting eight to ten seconds, the bird took flight, dipped down behind the trees, and was gone.

Hurriedly, I checked my field guide, and soon realized that I had seen a male Western Tanager, but I felt that I needed another look at this bird. It was a life species for me, and I wanted to record as much information as possible, but a three-hour

72-1P 91-31  
DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Laughing Gull

Number: 1 2nd-year, 1 1st-year

Location: Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co.

Habitat: large mudflat along lakeshore

Date: 6, 11 August 1991

Time: 7:21 a.m.-1:56 p.m. on 6 August

Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 2600 Glen Burnie Raleigh, N.C. 27607

Others who saw bird: Bob Myers, m.ob.

Description of bird(s): On 6 August 1991, I was birding the south side of Red Rock Reservoir in hopes of finding the 1st-year Laughing Gull reported there. After about 30 minutes of searching, I located a first-year Laughing Gull resting with several hundred Ring-billed and three Franklin's gulls on a large mudflat. I was able to study the bird from a moderate distance over the next couple of hours while attempting to photograph it. At approximately 9:40 a.m. I noticed that a second-year Laughing Gull was also present. This bird appeared to be in heavy molt as the flight feathers and tail were very tattered. Later, I observed the first-year bird near the dam of the reservoir from 12:54 to 1:56 p.m.

A description of the first-year bird is as follows. The bird was nearly the same length as nearby Ring-billed Gulls, though noticeably slimmer. The bird was larger and proportionately longer-winged than any of the three Franklin's Gulls present. The bill was dark-colored, proportionately longer than the bill of a Franklin's Gull, and had a more pronounced gonys. The head and breast were dark brown, except for a white area around the base of the bill. The faint eye crescents were white and broken to the front and rear of each eye. The mantle was also dark brown with a light gray patch on the upper mantle. The wings were dark brown, gradually darkening to black towards the wingtip. In flight, the black primaries and secondaries were evident. The tail, also seen in flight, was marked by a broad, black terminal band and a paler uppertail. The rump appeared pale brown. The lower belly and undertail coverts were white. The legs were black and as long as those of a Ring-billed Gull. Compared to the nearby Franklin's Gulls, the bill was longer and more hooked, the head was flatter, the legs were longer, and the bird had a slimmer appearance. Based on the pale gray patch on the upper mantle, I concluded that this individual was in the midst of the molt from juvenile to first-winter plumage. I have enclosed a photo of this bird.

The second-year bird was similar to the individual described above as far as size and structure. The head of this individual was whitish with a pale gray nape almost connecting the eyes. This bird also showed faint white eye crescents. The rest of the underparts and undertail coverts were white. The mantle was dark gray, slightly darker than the mantle of a Ring-billed Gull. In flight, the wings were the same color as the mantle except for the black primaries. As I mentioned earlier, this bird was in very heavy molt with almost all of the flight feathers very worn and a couple of primaries missing. The tail feathers also showed some wear. The tail was white except for a black tail band that was broken in the middle. I concluded that this individual was molting from second-summer to second-winter plumage.

Similar species and how eliminated: The only species similar to a Laughing Gull is Franklin's Gull. This species was eliminated on the basis of size, bill size and shape, leg length, and wing and tail pattern.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were very good with overcast skies on the 6th and clear skies on the 11th. Estimated viewing distance was as close as 50 feet on the 6th. I used a Buschnell 20-45x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have seen two other Laughing Gulls in Iowa in the last two years. I am very familiar with this species from the East Coast.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America and Grant Gulls: A guide to Identification

How long before field notes made: Written during initial observation on 6 August

How long before this form completed: completed 5 Sep 1991

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A description of the first-year bird is as follows. The bird was nearly the same length as a nearby Ring-billed Gull, though noticeably slimmer. The bill was larger and proportionately longer than any of the three Franklin's Gulls present. The bill was dark-colored, proportionately longer than the bill of a Franklin's Gull, and had a more pronounced gonys. The head and breast were dark brown, except for a white area around the base of the bill. The faint eye crescents were white and broken to the front and rear of each eye. The mantle was also dark brown with a light gray patch on the upper mantle. The wings were dark brown, gradually darkening to black towards the wingtip. In flight, the black primaries and secondaries were evident. The tail also was in flight, was marked by a broad black terminal band and a pair of upright tail rump appeared pale brown. The lower belly and under tail covers were white. The legs were black and as long as those of a Ring-billed Gull. Compared to the nearby Franklin's Gull, the bill was longer and more hooked, the head was flatter, the legs were longer, and the bird had a slimmer appearance. Based on the pale gray patch on the upper mantle, I concluded that this individual was in the midst of the molt from juvenile to first-winter plumage. I have enclosed a photo of this bird.

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Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were very good with overcast skies on the 6th and clear skies on the 11th. Estimated viewing distance was as close as 50 feet on the 6th. I used a Bushnell 30-42x spotting scope.