

Whimbrel
24 May 1995
NC, Hamilton Co., IA
*Kent, *Fuller

Record Number: 95-13
Classification: A-D

IBL 65:73, 66:96; Kent and Fuller 1996

DOCUMENTATIONS

Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246
Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 65:73
Records Committee: IBL 66:96
Kent, T. H., and J. L. Fuller. 1996. Whimbrel in Hamilton
County. Iowa Bird Life 66:29.

VOTE: 7 A-D

walking alone along the edge of the water. My first thought was that the bird might be a juvenile Sabine's Gull. After about 20 minutes, I concluded the bird was a juvenile Black-headed Gull. Almost immediately, an adult Black-headed Gull landed in my scope view and fed the bird a large minnow. The juvenile bird was similar to the adult in size, being slightly larger than a Franklin's Gull. The overall appearance was very rust-colored. The bill was bicolored with the basal two thirds pale pink and the distal one third dark. The head was mostly white, except for a brown cap and a blackish auricular patch. The bird had an incomplete white eyering that was broken in front of the eye. There was a white collar across the back of the neck. The lower hindneck, mantle, and upperwings were dark brown with a scalloped appearance. The mantle and hindneck were slightly darker than the upperwings. The scalloped appearance was created by the buffy or gold tips to the scapulars. The primaries were black, with some white on the outer edge of the wing visible on the perched bird. The underparts were white. On the foreneck, brown color extending forward from each bend in the wing met to form a complete bib. The bib was widest on the sides of the neck, but was connected by only a thin brown line. The tail was white with a narrow black terminal band on the upper surface. The legs were flesh-colored. The upperwing pattern was very striking. There was a brown carpal bar. The outer primaries and tips of several inner primaries were solid black. The secondary coverts were pale gray. The tips of all secondaries were black, creating a black bar along the trailing edge of the wing. The remainder of the upperwing was white. In flight, the undersides of the flight feathers appeared black while the underwing coverts appeared white. The adult with the young bird was very similar to the adult I had seen earlier at the north end of Spirit Lake, and I initially assumed they were the same individual. However, I returned to the north end of Spirit Lake at approximately 4 p.m. that afternoon and found an adult bird still present there. Upon closer examination, the adult at Kettleson WPA had a much more complete hood that lacked white flecking. I also noted that the bird had a partial white eyering, broken in front of the eye. On at least two occasions, the adult at Kettleson WPA attacked Great Blue Herons, presumably in defense on the young bird. Both times, the adult gull repeatedly gave a call that was reminiscent of an American Crow, but higher-pitched.

I observed these birds again on 3 and 5 August 1994. At least one adult remained in the area through 12 August 1994 (Kent 1995). These represent only the second and third records of Black-headed Gull in Iowa. The first record was of an adult on 2, 4 November 1989 at Saylorville Reservoir (Dinsmore 1993). Another adult appeared at Big Creek Lake from 17 to 23 November 1994 (Kent 1995). This species is a rare vagrant to the upper Midwest with fewer than 10 records each from Minnesota, Nebraska, Illinois, and Missouri. All records are of single birds.

Black-headed Gulls first bred in North America in Newfoundland in 1977 (Finch 1978). They have nested only once in the United States, in Massachusetts in 1984 (Holt et al. 1986). There are a few summer records for the upper Midwest, but the only one suggestive of possible breeding was the adult from 28 May into July 1986 in a large Franklin's Gull colony at North Heron Lake in Jackson County, Minnesota (Janssen 1986), about 20 miles northwest of Spirit Lake. A strong case can be made that Black-headed Gulls bred in northwestern Iowa or adjacent Minnesota in 1994. The young are fed and cared for by both parents and leave the nest after about 10 days, but remain nearby. The fledging period is about 35 days (Cramp 1983). While the juvenile bird was clearly capable of flight, it did not appear to be a strong flier. The presence of both adults with the juvenile also supports breeding nearby since both adults feed the young until fledging, usually at intervals of 45 minutes (Brandl and

Nelsen 1988). It is unlikely that the adults would disperse far from the nest site while continuing to feed the young. It seems reasonable to conclude that the birds bred nearby, possibly at or within a few miles of Kettleson WPA. It also seems certain that the birds bred close enough to constitute the second breeding record for this species in the United States.

LITERATURE CITED

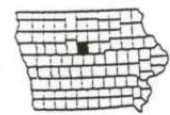
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 Cramp, S. (ed.). 1983. Handbook of the birds of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. vol. 3. Oxford Univ. Press, London.
 Dinsmore, S. J. 1993. Common Black-headed Gull at Saylorville Reservoir. *Iowa Bird Life* 63:53-54.
 Finch, D. W. 1978. Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) breeding in Newfoundland. *American Birds* 32:312.
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✓ WHIMBREL IN HAMILTON COUNTY

THOMAS H. KENT AND JAMES L. FULLER

On 24 May 1995 at 10:40 a.m., we were driving south on U.S. 69 in north-central Hamilton County when Kent saw a large shorebird silhouetted against the water in a flooded farm field near the road. As we turned around and stopped to look at it, we both shouted "Whimbrel" simultaneously. It was a large brownish shorebird roughly the size of a godwit with long, relatively thick gray bill that became markedly decurved over its distal half. The angle of the bill with the head made the bird look flat headed. There was a distinct white eye line and dark cap with a thin central crown stripe. Otherwise, the bird was a nondescript brown--lighter and plainer below and flecked with feather edgings above. The legs were dark pale gray and the eye was dark. The only other large shorebird with a decurved bill that occurs in Iowa is Long-billed Curlew, which is a much larger bird with longer bill, cinnamon coloration, and no crown stripe. Although we immediately called several birders, to the best of our knowledge, no other birders saw this bird. The Whimbrel is a Casual species in Iowa with records from 6 of the last 10 years, most from mid to late May.



211 Richards Street, Iowa City, IA 52246 and 6 Longview Knoll, RR 6, Iowa City, IA 52240

95-13

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Whimbrel; **Number:** 1

Location: north central Hamilton Co. (U.S. 69 and D20), Iowa.

Date: 24 May 1995; **Time:** 10:40 to 10:50 a.m.

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

Others before/with/after: with Jim Fuller

Habitat and circumstances: flooded area of plowed field (farmland)

Description of bird: While driving south on U.S. 69, I spotted a large shorebird silhouetted against the water in a flooded farm field near the road. I turned around and pulled off to look at it. Jim and I shouted "Whimbrel" simultaneously. It was a large brownish shorebird with long relatively thick bill that became marked decurved over the distal one-fourth of the bill. The angle of the bill with the head made the bird look flat headed. There was a distinct white eye line and dark cap with a thin central crown stripe. Otherwise, the bird was a non-descript brown -- lighter and plain below and flecked with feather edgings above. The legs were dark pale gray and the eye was dark.

Voice: not heard

Similar species: Long-billed Curlew is much larger, rustier, and lacks eye line and crown stripe. Eskimo Curlew is much smaller and thinner-billed.

Any one have reservations?: No.

Light: side and back lighting on a sunny day; **Distance:** 100 yards (guess); **Optics:** 10x binocular, 20x scope.

Previous experience: Have seen many, but only one other in Iowa.

References before/after viewing: none.

Time of notes: While viewing; **Final typing:** 2 days.

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Whimbrel

LOCATION: Wet spot in corn stubble field just southeast of the intersection of US hiway 69 and county road D-20 (Hamilton County)

DATE & TIME: 24 May, 1995 (10:40-50 AM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240

OTHER OBSERVERS: Tom Kent

BACKGROUND: We were driving hiway 69 south in Hamilton County, and looking for shorebirds in standing water in farm fields, when Tom Kent noticed a large shorebird in one of the wet spots.

DESCRIPTION: The size of this bird was about that of a Godwit. It was generally a brown bird with long legs, and a long, downcurved bill. The body was brown, lighter on the underparts, which also had short streaks. The folded wing and back were darker brown, with light brown feather edging. The neck seemed long, and the head was small. The head had a dark eyeline, dark crown stripes, and a dark eye. The bill was a dark gray color and very long (estimated two and a half times the head width). It seemed straight for over half its length, and then was quite downturned. It was thicker at the base and narrowed to the tip. The legs appeared to be thick, and were a dark gray color. The bird did not raise its wings or fly, and no vocalization was heard. It was exhibiting feeding behavior, probing at the edge of the water area.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Long-billed Curlew is larger with a much longer bill, and is a warmer brown color.

VIEWING CONDITIONS and OPTICS: It was late morning of a partly cloudy day. Viewing was to the east and south, using a Bushnell Spacemaster telescope (20X) at distances of about 150 feet.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen one other Whimbrel in Iowa on 27 May, 1994. I have also seen this bird on other occasions in Wisconsin, California, Texas, and Florida.

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES: Field notes were made at the time of viewing, and this form was typed on 25 May. No field guide was consulted.