

Laughing Gull Record Number: 91-12
17 Jul 1991 Classification: A-P
Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA
*M. Proescholdt, *Johnson, *Fuller, *Bray
to 11 Aug; IBL 61:115, 62:15, 70, Dinsmore et al 95

DOCUMENTATIONS:

Mark Proescholdt, 17 Jul
Ann Johnson, 17, 21, 27 Jul
Tanya E. Bray, 21 Jul
Jim Fuller, 25 Jul
Barbara L. Wilson, 21 Jul [not reviewed]
Randall Pinkston, 4 Aug [not reviewed]
Stephen J. Dinsmore, 6 Aug, see 91-31 [not reviewed]

PHOTOGRAPH

Stephen J. Dinsmore, 6 Aug, P-0307 [not distributed for first review, one print reviewed at meeting]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 61:115, 62:15
Records Committee: IBL 62:70
Dinsmore, S. J., A. Johnson, and M. Proescholdt. 1995. Laughing Gulls at Red Rock Reservoir. Iowa Bird Life 65:20-21.

VOTE: 7-A-D

A-D, a good set of supporting documents, all observers seem to agree on overall size, bill size and shape and plumage coloration. All seem to have eliminated Franklin's gull.

A-D, Fairly distinctive gull adequately described.

A-D, A correct, but brief description of a juvenile Laughing Gull. However, I am concerned that leg color is not reported (pinkish in juvenile Ring-billed Gulls / blackish in juvenile Laughing Gulls), and that juvenile Ring-billed Gull is not specifically eliminated (normally not seen in Iowa but possible in July). My A-D vote is based mostly on bill description which fits Laughing Gull.

A-D, Appearance of juvenile is distinctive. Distance not given, but with details seen, one would expect that white trailing edge to secondaries, secondary bar, and white tip to tail feathers would have been seen. Not clear why the other two observers did not document this bird.

A-D, With the additional documentation this record is beyond reasonable doubt. All necessary field marks to confirm this species were noted by more than one documenter, though not all field marks were listed by all documenters. A fairly good study of the juvenile of this species.

A-D, Adequate details for identification. More documentations were submitted for this Red Rock bird.

REVOTE at meeting of 11 Apr 1992 after viewing photo: 7 A-P

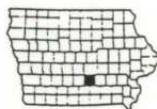
Sioux City; *Maridel Jackson (MJ), Ankeny; Ann M. Johnson (AMJ), Norwalk; Thomas N. Johnson (TNJ), Mystic; Matthew C. Kenne (MCK), Algona; Thomas H. Kent (THK), Iowa City; Bob Livermore (BL), *Francis L. Moore (FLM), Waterloo; Sioux City; Babs K. Padelford and Loren J. Padelford (BKP/LJP), Bellevue, 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.

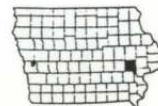
The Laughing Gulls were last seen together on 11 August. These are the fifth and sixth records of Laughing Gull for Iowa, all since 1989. The other records include single juvenile birds at Red Rock Reservoir, Marion County on 19-26 August 1989, Midwest Power Ponds, Pottawattamie County on 27 August 1989, 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.

4024 Arkansas Drive, Ames, IA 50014 (SJD), 532 120th Avenue, Norwalk, IA 50211 (AJ), and Box 65, Liscomb, IA 50148 (MP)

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

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What species? Laughing Gull juvenile How many? 1Location? Red Rock Reservoir - (Marion Co.)Type of habitat? mudflats near retreating waterWhen? date(s): July 17, 1991 time: 9:00 a.m. to 9:15 a.m. } approximately
11:00 a.m. to 12:10 p.m. }Who? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Box 65, Liscomb, Iowa 50148others with you: Eugene and Eloise Armstrongothers before or after you: Tim Schentz

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.

This gull was roosting with many Ring-Billed Gulls on a mud edge near the water. It was a brownish gull noticeably smaller than the Ring-Billed Gulls around it. It had a black bill that was thick and large. It had dark legs and all brownish head and back. Its breast area was brownish on the sides and pale, creamy white in the middle much like the Olive-sided Flycatcher's vest. All of a sudden the birds were in the air and flying into the water to land. Armstrongs and I left then

I came back later myself and the gulls were again roosting on the mudflat. The bill of the Laughing Gull appears about the same length and thickness of a Ring-Billed Gull right beside it seen from 130 yards. The inside of the bill appears to be reddish on this hot day. It is probably twice the size of Forster's terns nearby.

(Continued on back)

Similar species and how eliminated:

see on back

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

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

1st time → sunny + clear, looking east into sun and then sun at an angle to our side, distance - 150 yards, 110 yards, + 80 yards. 8X30 Binocs and Kowa scope - (Probably 20X).2nd time → sunny, sun at side, 130 yards + later 110 yards a bit (estimated), 8X30 Binocs, 22X Scope

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

First real observation of Laughing Gull juvenile. Have seen adults along Gulf Coast.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Audubon Master Guide, Natl. Geographic guide, R.T. Peterson's guide.

How long before field notes made? while viewing this form completed? July 18, 1991
the bird

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

The bird had a "long-wing" look to it as it was perched on the mud.

The back and the flanks are all dark-brownish going to the darker primary wing tips. No white was seen at all on the wings. The light brownish coloration goes from near the bill up the forehead to the crown of the head and down the neck and to the back without interruption. No whitish coloration broke up that brownish patterning.

There was a touch of lighter (whitish) color around the bill. The bird had a pale, creamy white throat, belly, and underneath. It had a dark eye. At times it seemed to have eye crescents but I'm not sure on that. I saw a big area of bright white at the base of the tail when it spread its wings once.

Similar Species :

A Franklin's Gull juvenile or first-winter bird has a clear-cut blackish half-hood, a smaller bill, smaller size, and a white forehead. A juvenile Mew gull is much darker, has a thin bill, and light grayish legs. Juvenile Herring and California Gulls are much larger — larger than Ring-Billed Gulls — and lack the bright white at the base of the tail.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species: Laughing Gull - juvenile

Location: Whitebreast Area, Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA

Habitat: Open water with some sand bars along edges

Date:	17 July 1991	Time:	15:10 to 15:30
	21 July 1991		11:45 to 12:15
	27 July 1991		12:00 to 13:15

Name and Address: Ann Johnson, 532 120th Avenue, Norwalk, Iowa 50211

Other observers: Tim Schantz

Description of bird: My first sighting of this gull, on 17 July from a considerable distance, was when a roosting flock of Ring-billed gulls flew from sand bar to open water. The gull stood out from the others by virtue of its size and structure. Overall length was just slightly less than Ring-billeds, but the bird was much slimmer with finer features which gave it a generally smaller look. The head and neck were perhaps the most distinguishing features, being much more delicate and giving the bird somewhat of a large phalarope look in comparison to the other gulls. The head, front of the neck, breast and what I could see of the flanks were pale gray/brown. The mantle was darker gray/brown. The primaries were black and extended a considerable distance beyond the tail, helping to make the overall length fairly comparable to the other gulls. The nape was darker and provided a blending of the light colored head to the darker mantle. I was only able to see the bird in flight briefly as it returned to the roost. Notable characteristics included a black secondary band and a white rump and light gray to dirty white tail with a broad, black and complete subterminal band. Distance precluded any detailed observation of bare parts, although in comparison with other gulls the profile of the bird showed a bill which was fairly long and slender.

On 21 July I was able to observe the bird from approximately 100 yards. The mantle and flight feathers were dark brown with lighter edgings to the wing coverts, except that the outer primaries were black. The round tail appeared white with a complete black subterminal band. The head, neck and breast were a lighter chocolate brown. The belly and vent were white. In flight the bird showed dark brown wing linings with black primary tips. The flanks appeared brown with some white mottling on the chin and down the sides. The crown and nape were a bit darker than the rest of the bird but there were no distinct lines. The bill and legs were dark. The bill was long, thin, and gently curved. It appeared to be approximately 75% the length of the head. The bird was with Franklin's and Ring-billed gulls on both 17 and 24 July. It was larger than the Franklin's and smaller than the Ring-billeds, but appeared nearly the same size, albeit of different structure, when compared with Ring-billeds in flight.

Similar species and how eliminated: The general shape and structure of the bird identified it as one of the hooded gulls. The lack of any carpal bar and overall brown appearance, combined with a length approaching Ring-billed size, generally eliminated the smaller hooded gulls. In direct comparison with a

juvenile Franklin's, it was browner overall and had no impression of a hood at any angle. The Franklin's showed more white below than did the Laughing. The lack of hood, in conjunction with extremely long primary projection, duskiest underparts, and a complete, wide subterminal tail band, would eliminate Franklin's Gull and indicate Laughing Gull.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about identification? No

Viewing conditions (lighting, distance, optics): The sun was shining behind me, but the temperature on 17 July was such that there were many heat waves when looking through the scope which, combined with an estimated distance of half to three-quarters of a mile, made for less than optimal but adequate conditions. I viewed the bird through the scope at 25x-50x. Observation on subsequent visits was with good light at approximately 100 yards.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I was able to observe the juvenile Laughing Gull at Red Rock a couple of years ago and have also seen them on the Gulf Coast.

References and persons consulted before writing description: National Geographic Guide consulted during observation and Grant's Gulls studied prior to observation and prior to completing documentation form.

How long before field notes made? Notes written during observation How long before this form completed? Upon return home; updated after each observation

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*)

(1 Juvenile)

Red Rocks Reservoir

21 July 1991

Observer: Tanya E. Bray, 1107 Ironwood Ct, Apt 186, Bellevue, NE 68005

With me: Barbara L. Wilson, W. Ross Silcock

Description: A slender dark brown gull smaller than Ring-billed Gull in direct comparison. Long slender, all-black bill with a distinct droop, hooked at the tip. Wings long, slender and pointed. Primaries all sooty brown to black. The mantle was brown and appeared scalloped. The head was slightly lighter brown. Tail white at base with wide black band at tip. Eye dark.

Behavior: Roosting on mud flat with Ring-billed Gulls, Forster's and Caspian Terns. Flew out and rested on lake.

Similar species: Too dark and too large for Franklins; bill much longer and more hooked than Franklin's. Smaller, darker and more slender, more elongated silhouette than nearby Ring-bills.

Experience: Have seen Laughing in Texas several years ago, and recently in Nebraska and Iowa.

Equipment: 25 x Bushnell Scope, 7 x binoculars

Notes written: 5 minutes after sighting. This documentation about 2 weeks later.

DOCUMENTATION OF UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTING

SPECIES: Laughing gull (Juvenile).

LOCATION: Red Rock Reservoir, Marion County.

DATE & TIME: 25 July, 1991 (6:10-20PM).

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

OTHER OBSERVERS: At same time Tim Schantz. M.ob. at other times.

BACKGROUND: Tim Schantz had reported a juvenile laughing gull to the Iowa Birdline nine days earlier. On this day, he had relocated the bird, and was trying to get close enough to photograph it when I arrived. We watched the bird in a flock of about 25 ring-billed gulls, and one immature Franklin's gull. They were standing on a mud flat about 80 yards away. After 10 minutes this bird and the Franklin's gull got up and flew east out of sight.

DESCRIPTION: The general size was slightly, but noticeably smaller than any of the ring-billed gulls, and a little larger than the Franklin's. It was quite a dark bird, compared to the ring-billeds, and the other feature that stood out was a bill that seemed too big for its head size. It was generally a brownish gray color on the upperparts, with black folded wing tips, and light underparts.

The head was brownish-gray on the sides, top, and nape, but the throat was lighter. The eye was dark, and had a partial white eye ring. The bill was all black, and seemed to be large in comparison to head size. The back and folded wing were brownish-gray, although there was a somewhat round lighter patch on the wing just at the angle. The tip of the folded wing was black, and the wing extended beyond the tail. The legs were black. The underparts were whitish.

In flight the upperwing was pretty much a uniform grayish-brown, except for the wing tips, which were black. I didn't see the underwing very well, but the dark wing tips were visible, and the inner part of the underwing was lighter, but not uniform. There was a very well defined black tail band, sharply delineated from the white rump.

Differences between Laughing gull and Franklin's gull:

- (1) Franklin's was a generally gray shade, while the Laughing was a brownish-gray.
- (2) Franklin's had a grayish hood, although poorly defined

it was easily observed, but the Laughing did not display a hood.

- (3) Larger size of Laughing gull.
- (4) Franklin's tail band was not as dark, nor as sharply delineated from the white rump as that of the Laughing.
- (5) Franklin's bill was relatively smaller in comparison to its head size.
- (6) Franklin's wing was a lighter color in flight.

SIMILAR SPECIES:Differences with Franklin's gull discussed above.

OPTICS and VIEWING CONDITIONS:Looking northeast in evening with KOWA TSN-4 telescope with 20-60X zoom lens, and watched bird in flight with Swift Audubon 8.5 X 44 binoculars. The evening was clear and cool.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE:Saw juvenile Laughing gull at Red Rock in August, 1989.

REFERENCES and FIELD NOTES:Field notes were made immediately, and this form was typed the next day, July 26th. National Geographic field guide was consulted after returning home that evening.

91-12
not reviewed

Laughing Gull

1 bird at Red Rock Reservoir, seen July 21, 1991.
Seen with Tanya Bray and Ross Silcock.

Description: "One immature, with Ring-bills. Dark and slim, smaller [shorter] but especially thinner than the Ring-bills. Bill, however, about as big as theirs and decidedly dropping at tip. Dark brown and not as mottled at the two paler young Ring-bills nearby. Primaries black and long but can't see the tail. Throat pale but without [sharp] contrast. Face a bit lighter [than the body] too. Chest dark." (quoting notes taken at the time of sighting; additions in brackets.)

Similar species: The dark brown color and the bill, which even I had to admit was long, seem to eliminate the similar, and far more common, Franklin's Gull. Proportions all different from the Ring-bills and much too slim for any other white-headed gull.

Overcast day. I'm not sure our direction to the gulls, but the light was OK. They weren't too far for our 20x and stronger scopes, though we had to move around to see past the willows. Mostly we saw the bird standing; sometimes it preens. I believe we saw it fly once, too.

We used the National Geographic guide at the time, and I think other birds ~~books~~.
Once again we were chasing a stake-out bird. I took notes at the time.

Barbara L. Wilson
Rt. 1, Box 41
Hastings, Iowa 51540
10 November 1991