

Common Black-headed Gull
26 Apr 1981
Riverton Area, Fremont Co., IA
*Babs/Loren Padelford, *Rick Wright
IBL 54:38

Record Number: 83-AB
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATIONS

Tanya Bray (26 April 1981)
Rick Wright (26 April 1981)
W. Ross Silcock (26 April 1981)
Babs/Loren Padelford (29 April 1981)

LETTER:

Barb Wilson to Kent, 30 August 1983

REFERENCE

Records Committee: IBL 54:38

VOTE: 2-II, 2-IV, 2-V, 1-abstain

V, The delayed reporting and incomplete description of the wing pattern with no mention of the underwing make me reluctant to evaluate this bird. A IV would make the species hypothetical in Iowa, a category more appropriate for an easy-to-identify poorly described bird. A drawing of the wing would have helped. The bill is the most suggestive feature; flight pattern is more subjective.

IV, Underwing pattern not noted.

V, Long delay--this bird well described in European guides.

IV, Not beyond shadow of a doubt.

II, After sending this in I'd better not vote it down!!

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation

by the Records Committee

of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: BLACK-HEADED GULL

DATE SEEN: April 29, 1981

SITE OF OBSERVATION: Fremont County, Iowa

OBSERVERS: Babs and Loren Padelford; Rick Wright; Tanya Bray; Ross Silcock

DATE OF REVIEW: January 1984

METHOD OF REVIEW: Mailed To Records Committee

CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: V

COMMENTS: The primary reason for rejection of this record was the failure to describe the underwing pattern. Lateness of submission also raised questions, but the record was not considered to be incorrect, but rather, inadequately described for acceptance.

It was suggested that the observers might want to send their notes to an outside authority.

To date, there is one Missouri record (Maryville, Oct 30, 1976) and one hypothetical record from Kansas. These are the only records from states bordering Iowa. Note that there are no Minnesota ~~or~~ records, but there are at least 2 Illinois records (Feb 10, 1973 and July 15, 1976). ^(except Illinois)

The opinions expressed here are based on the information available to the Committee and should not necessarily preclude an alternate interpretation by those who observed the bird firsthand.

Any action may be re-reviewed upon submission of additional evidence.

Explanation of Classification:

- I = labeled, diagnostic specimen, photograph, or recording available for review by the Committee
- II = acceptable sight record documented independently by 3 or more observers
- III = acceptable sight record documented by 1 or 2 observers
- IV = probably correct record, but not beyond doubt
- V = record with insufficient evidence to judge
- VI = probably incorrect identification, escapee, or otherwise unacceptable record

Classification is based on the highest category agreed upon by six of seven committee members.

BLACK HEADED GULL

83-b

April 26, 1981

Riverton State Wildlife Management Area
Fremont County, Iowa

Number seen:(1)

Description:

A small gull; equal in length to a Forster's Tern in direct comparison. The head was white with just a smudge of gray on the crown. There was a round, black dot behind the eye. The bill was dark red with a light pinkish area near the base. The mantle was a very pale soft gray. The tail was white with a dark terminal band. The wings were long, extending well beyond the tail when the gull was standing. In flight the wings were "striped" with a dark M or W. The upper surface of the primaries were white with the first primary black. The trailing edge of the wings were dark from the primaries to the body. The legs and feet were yellowish-orange.

Behavior:

When first seen the gull was standing on a mud flat with a small group of Forster's Terns. When flushed it flew with strong wingbeats; more like a Ring-billed Gull than the delicate tern-like flight of a Bonaparte's Gull.

Similar Species:

Bonaparte's Gull; The main differences noted were the size and shape of the bill (much longer and heavier than Bonaparte's) and the style of flight.

Books Consulted: At time of sighting--Birds of North America, Robbins, et al and A FIELD Guide to the Birds, East of the Rockies, R.T. Peterson. Both of these books were not helpful. At the time of sending in this documentation: Seabirds; An Identification Guide, P. Harrison. The description of the bills and the emphasis in this book on "jizz" motivated this late submittance.

Equipment: 25x spotting scope
6 x 30 binoculars

Tanya Bray
9708 Grover
Omaha, Ne 68124

BLACK HEADED GULL

April 26, 1981

Riverton Wildlife Management Area
Fremont County

A gull about the length of a Forster's Tern. The head was high, the forehead peaked. There was a dusky auricular patch. The bill was long and dark brown-red. The back was very pale; the wings with white tips, and dark bar and trailing edge. The tail had a thick black terminal band, with no white behind it. The feet were yellow.

Written from notes taken at time of sighting.

Rick Wright
12 Summer St
Somerville, Mass 02143

Corroborative statement: Probable Black-headed Gull in Fremont County

A group of birders including Tanya Bray, Babs Padelford, and Rick Wright found a small gull at Riverton GMA April 26, 1981. In good light, all being familiar with Bonaparte's Gull, we examined the bird closely with the thought in mind that the bird might be a Black-headed Gull.

Although I took notes on the plumage at the time, I cannot relocate them. However others have decided to submit the record, mainly to put on record the possible occurrence of this species, after reading literature which was not available at the time of the sighting (Grant's book on gull identification, and Tucker's Seabirds: An Identification Guide).

My impression of the bird at the time of the observation was of a winter-plumaged Bonaparte's Gull when at rest on a small mudflat. I also recollect that the legs were yellowish and the bill did not appear jet black, but rather was very dull reddish black, with a pale area at the base. There were no other gulls for comparison, and so I cannot give any indication of the size of the bill relative, for example, to the size of the head.

When the bird was flushed, we all immediately noticed how heavily the bird flew, not at all as gracefully as a Bonaparte's. There was no wind or other obvious condition which would cause, say a Bonaparte's, to fly unusually laboriously. I remember remarking that it flew like a Ring-billed Gull, rather than a Bonaparte's.

In summary, I believe the bird could well have been a Black-headed Gull, but at the time did not have enough information to make a decision. I do feel more confident now that it was a Black-headed than I was then.

I might add that this species has occurred in northwest Missouri, at Maryville Oct 30, 1976 (Am Birds 31:184). While most midwest records are in fall, there are enough spring records to bring one to feel that this record, if indeed of a Black-headed Gull, might not be unexpected.

Of course there are hazards to submitting a record so long after the sighting and after having misplaced field notes, and I realize that doing this leaves me open to criticism. However I am sure the record will be dealt with with these factors in mind.

W. Ross Silcock
RR2, Malvern, Iowa 51551
August 16, 1983.

Possible Immature Black-headed Gull April 29, 1981
Riverton Wildlife Area

Body size was slightly larger than the Forster's terns sitting next to it.

Bill appeared large (estimated to be $3/4$ the length of the head) and was a dull brownish-red color.

Feet and legs - orange.

Eye - dark.

White head with round dark spot behind eye. Feathers were shaded light gray on back of head.

While sitting the wing extended 3-4" beyond the tail. The tail had a black terminal band with no visible white tip. In flight there was a narrow dark edging on primaries and secondaries extending to forward leading edge of wing from tip to elbow. White windows on wing in the primaries.

Sitting it looked pale gray on the back. In flight generally pale. Did not have the characteristic tern-like or swallow-like appearance of Bonaparte's. The flight was straight and deliberate.

We were approximately 150 - 200 yards away from the bird. We were on the west bank looking into the mid-morning sun. Part of the time the bird was sitting on a mud flat in about the center of the pond, and part of the time it was flying, generally circling the pool.

(The two things about this bird that stand out at this time - 8/2/83 - are the large bill size (also the dull red color) and the deliberate, direct flight pattern. Since the sighting we have paid particular attention to the bills of Bonaparte's gulls, and they have all seemed smaller than the more prominent one described above.)

Babs & Loren Padelford
1405 Little John Rd.
Bellevue, Ne. 68005

a Bushnell 25x scope was used.

30 Aug 1983

Dear Mr. Kent:

A couple years ago I heard a lot about a gull seen at River-ton. It was identified as Black-headed by the observers, largely because it just looked & acted wrong for a Bonaparte's. ~~At the time~~ ~~the~~ ~~report~~ ~~wasn't~~ ~~turned~~ ~~in~~ ~~because~~ ~~that~~ ~~didn't~~ ~~seem~~ ~~enough~~ ~~to~~ ~~go~~ ~~on~~. Now a new field guide to seabirds is out & it stresses "jizz", the general feel of the bird, its characteristic look & behavior. As a result, the observers have gained confidence in their identification & are turning in the report. It does include some information on the characteristic beat of the species. Some important field marks, most noticeably the underwing pattern, were not noticed.

All in all, I'm inclined to believe this report. It may not be acceptable, especially if it's a first state record, but it may well be true.

- Basil Wilson