

Laughing Gull
26 Mar 1977
Coralville Res., Johnson Co., IA
N. S. Halmi
Halmi 1977

Record Number: 81-BD
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION [obtained 1999, not reviewed]

Halmi, N. S. 3/26/1977

REFERENCES

Halmi, N.S. 1977. Sight record of a Laughing Gull by the Coralville Reservoir. IBL 47:64.
Field Reports: IBL 47:59

VOTE (1981): 6-III, I-IV

III, Description appears diagnostic -- especially wing markings.

III, single observer.

III, Careful observer who was well aware of rarity of this species.

III, Single observer sight record, single occasion. Description seems OK.

III, Well described; unexpected nature of observation well- appreciated.

[see next record for continuation, record reviewed as 85-b]

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Record Number: 81-BD

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rereviewed during revision of state list; IBL 47:64, 56:43 [was 85-b]

REVOTE: 5-IV, 2-V [see previous record sheet]

'V, Rosy color makes it sound like a Franklin's Gull.'

'V, Fits first summer Franklin's. No features described to indicate that shape, bill, leg length, etc of Laughing.'

'IV, Very possibly a correct ID but more details on items like bill shape, grayness in tail or very careful attention to the tips of primaries as well as the "window" areas would be very helpful.'

'IV, Would be interested in Nick's comments based on current literature.'

'IV (Halmi), III (Stiles), Halmi's sighting is almost certainly a 1st spring Franklin's. Size is the only criterion which could fit a Laughing Gull, but without comparison this is subjective. Stiles's sighting has three points supporting Laughing Gull identification: Direct comparison for size; longer hood; and lack of white wing bar. Stiles record is barely passable.'

'IV, Could be III if shape of bird better described. Some characters suggest Franklin's (rosy hue, incomplete hood). ID depends (Franklin's) (comparing black-hooded ages only): (1) White tipped primaries (1st year) (Laughing: never shows white); (2) dark-centered tail (adult) (Laughing: tail immaculate); (3) rosy hue on breast (adult) (Laughing: not rosy); (4) rounded head, chunky appearance (flatter head, attenuated appearance); (5) rounded wingtips (pointed wingtips, long wings); (6) short, straight bill (long drooping bill--culmen decurved). Description has some Franklin's features: rosy hue, described as "very faint"; hood incomplete ("a few white specks"). Also Laughing features: tail pure white, no white on wings.'

'IV, Sounds suspiciously like Laughing, but size is the only field mark that looks useful.'

REVOTE (at meeting, 5 Oct 1985): 5-IV, 2-V

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Laughing Gull 2. Number: 1

3. Location Sandy Beach, Coralville Reservoir, Johnson Co.

4. Date: 3/26/1977 5. Time Bird seen: 3:30 PM to

6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field): Smaller than nearby Ring-billed gulls; hood almost completely black, with a few spots of white left; white around eyes as broken ring; underparts white, with very faint suggestion of pinkish cast; bill and feet dark, bluish-red; mantle gray, blends without any trace of a white band with the black wingtips; white on wing confined to trailing edge; no "window" apparent from below in flight either.
Small white spots at ends of primaries.

7. Description of voice, if heard: not heard
8. Description of behavior: stood on sandy beach; flew off on my approach, not to be located again.

9. Habitat - general: sandy shore of reservoir
specific: and flying out over lake

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
Franklin's gull: lack of white band separating a black on wing tip from mantle; size difference from Ring-billed not as obvious as for Franklin's. (in this case.)

11. Distance (how measured)? est. 60 ft. 12. Optical equipment: 7x35x Trinoid binoculars

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): overcast; good light; angle sun-observer-bird: 70 to -20°

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: very familiar with L. Gull from Texas coast; Franklin's gull seen in Iowa 1975-76; Texas 1974

15. Other observers: _____

16. Did the others agree with your identification? _____

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: _____

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description: standard field guides; Bailey and Niedrach "Colorado Birds"; Reilly; consulted over telephone with Peter C. Petersen, who was given a description and identified the bird as Laughing Gull without equivocation or prompting

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 2 hrs.

Signature: M. Halami Address: R#6

Date: 3/26/1977 City, State: IOWA CITY, IA 52240

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation
by the Records Committee
of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: Laughing Gull

DATE SEEN: 26 March 1977

SITE OF OBSERVATION: Johnson County

OBSERVERS: Nick Halm

DATE OF REVIEW: October 1985

METHOD OF REVIEW: Committee discussion

CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: V

COMMENTS: In light of the much improved information regarding identification of gulls which is available today, the Committee re-evaluated this record.

The possibility of a first-year Franklin's Gull could not be ruled out by the Committee, based on the published information. The details were somewhat equivocal, however. Indicating Franklin's Gull were the rosy hue seen, as well as the incompleteness, the latter characteristic of a first year Franklin's Gull. Features indicative of Laughing Gull were the immaculate tail, and the complete absence of white on the wings. A first year Franklin's Gull may show a small amount of white in the wing tips. Other information which would have been helpful was a direct size comparison with other gulls, some indication of the size of the bill, and the overall size and shape of the bird itself.

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.

Halmi, N. S. 1977. Sight record of a Laughing Gull by the Coralville Reservoir. Iowa Bird Life 47:64.

Sight record of a Laughing Gull by the Coralville Reservoir - On the afternoon of March 26 I was scanning the northern shore of the Coralville Reservoir at Sandy Beach for gulls. Ring-billed Gulls, mostly adults, were very numerous (over 100) and active. About 10 Herring Gulls, half of them immatures, were also present. As I walked back toward my car, disappointed about not having seen more unusual species, I saw a black-headed gull which had alighted on the sandy shore while I was looking away. It was next to a Ring-bill, and my first impression was that it was not as much smaller as I would have expected a Franklin's (let alone a Bonaparte's) to be. Its hood still had a few white specks, and the incomplete eyering was evident. The bill and legs were almost black, with a slight reddish tinge. The underparts were white, with a very faint rosy hue; the tail was pure white. As I got to within about 60 feet, I was paying special attention to the diagnostic wing pattern, expecting to see a white band separating the subterminal black spot from the rest of the wing (Franklin's Gull), or a large white triangle (Bonaparte's). When the bird flew, however, I noticed with great surprise that the only white on the wing was along the trailing edge, and that the gray of the mantle blended gradually with the black of the primaries. As the bird rose, no "window" at the base of the tip of the wings, as characteristic of Franklin's Gull, was evident. I reluctantly had to conclude that I had seen an adult Laughing Gull, in almost fully developed nuptial plumage. The lighting was excellent, with complete but no heavy overcast diffusing the sunlight, and my angle of vision was favorable.

Woody Brown's Annotated List puts the Laughing Gull in the hypothetical category for Iowa, on the basis of a March 25, 1941 sight record by B. F. Stiles at L. Manawa, Pottawattamie Co. IBL Vol 11, p. 36, 1941.). Bent mentions an earlier Iowa record (Blencoe, October 10, 1894). Thus this appears to be the third Iowa sight record for what the guidebooks describe as a strictly coastal species. Examination of the recent literature indicates that this categorization is no longer tenable. There have been reports of inland stragglers from Colorado, Nebraska and South Dakota. Purusal of *Am. Birds* for the years 1972-76 reveals 62 records for the midwest (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, Ohio and Michigan), with evidence of nesting in Wisconsin. The dates range from April 16 to November 18, both extremes being Chicago observations. In connection with an August 28 sighting in Waukegan, Lawrence Black asked whether these birds had come from the Atlantic via the St. Lawrence Seaway or from the Gulf of Mexico along the Mississippi. The pattern of observations suggests the former explanation for most of the occurrences along the Great Lakes. It is much more likely, however, that the 6 Laughing Gulls seen near E. St. Louis, Illinois on April 27, 1973 were of Gulf origin.

Like Stiles' 1941 sighting, this one was unusually early. The bird he described also was in nuptial plumage. It may be pertinent that strong southerly winds, up to 30 mph, had brought warm air (max. 70 degrees F) to our region all day March 25 and 26, and that this spring, contrary to expectations, has witnessed an early arrival of a number of migrant species (for example, a Franklin's Gull in full nuptial plumage was seen by Pete Petersen on February 27 in Davenport). N. S. HALMI, R. No. 6, Iowa City.