

Purple Gallinule
24 May 1994

Record Number: 94-11
Classification: A-D

Sweet M., Bremer Co., IA

*J. Fuller, *Scheib, *Pinkston, *Edwards

*Proescholdt; IBL 64:74; 65:81, Stone 1995

DOCUMENTATIONS

Jim Fuller (24 May), 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, IA 52240 [19 Aug 1994*]

James Scheib (24, 29 May), 10 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City [19 Aug 1994]

Randy Pinkston (26 May), 526 Reno St., Iowa City, IA 52245

Chris Edwards (26 May), 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty 52317 [19 Aug 1994]

Mark Proescholdt (28 May), Box 65, Liscomb 50148 [19 Aug 1994]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 64:74

Records Committee: IBL 65:81

Stone, T. 1995. Purple Gallinule in Bremer County. Iowa Bird Life 65:52.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Many detailed descriptions of plumage and bill eliminated Am. Coot and Common Morehen.

A-D, Did anyone get photos?

A-D, Seen by many.

OBSERVERS

Pam Allen (PA), West Des Moines; Reid Allen (RA), West Des Moines; Eloise Armstrong (EIA), Booneville; Eugene Armstrong (EuA), Booneville; Brian Blevins (BBI), Davenport; Gordon Brown (GBr), Ankeny; Robert Cecil (RCe), Des Moines; Ray Cummins (RCu), Centerville; Jeff Dankert (JDa), LaCrosse, WI; James J. Dinsmore (JJD), Ames; Stephen J. Dinsmore (SJD), Ames; Dan C. Dorrance (DCD), Davenport; Chris Edwards (CEd), North Liberty Bery Engebretsen (BE), Johnston; Peter Ernzen (PE), Ida Grove; Carolyn J. Fischer (CJF), Mason City Larry Fisher (Lfi), Davenport; Jim Fuller (JF), Iowa City; Rita Goranson (RGo), Mason City; Doug Harr (DH), Larchwood; Dennis Henrickson (DHe), Estherville; Nelson Hoskins (NH), Ottumwa; Art R. Huser (ARH), South Sioux City, NE; Bill F. Huser (BFH), South, Sioux City, NE; Ann Johnson (AJ), Norwalk; Tom Johnson (TJo), Mystic; Matthew C. Kenne (MCK), Algona; Thomas H. Kent (THK), Iowa City; Fred Leshler (FL), LaCrosse, WI; Babs Padelford (BP), Bellevue, NE; Loren Padelford (LP), Bellevue, NE; Marietta Petersen (MPe), Walnut; Mary Lou Petersen (MLP), Davenport; Peter C. Petersen (PCP), Davenport; Diane C. Porter (DCP), Fairfield; Beth Proescholdt (BPr), Liscomb; Mark Proescholdt (MP), Liscomb; James Quinlivan (JQ), Wapello; Tim Schantz (TSc), Otley; Lee Schoenewe (LSc), Spencer; W. Ross Silcock (WRS), Tabor; Jim Sinclair (JSi), Indianola; Dale Stone (DSt), Lake City; John Van Dyk (JV), Sioux Center; Hank Zaletel (HZ), Nevada.

Box 300, Tabor, IA 51653

PURPLE GALLINULE IN BREMER COUNTY

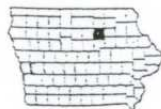
TOM STONE

On 24 May 1994, I was birding at Sweet Marsh in Bremer County. At 8:30 a.m., as I was walking a dike on the southern side of the marsh, a chicken-sized bird flushed from the side of the dike and landed in the water about 100 feet away. While the bird was in the air, my first thought was Common Moorhen.

When it landed, I realized it was a Purple Gallinule, a bird that I was familiar with in Florida. With good lighting, I was able to see blue-purple underparts and head, a red bill with yellow tip, pale blue frontal shield, brown back, long yellow legs, and white undertail. One behavioral characteristic was the continual flicking of its tail. There was ample lighting with partly cloudy skies, and I studied the bird for about 20 minutes. I then drove to George Wyth State Park to contact Tim Gedler, assistant ranger. Soon after that, I reported the sighting to the Iowa Birdline. Many observers were able to see the bird through 14 June, even though it became more secretive and difficult to find.

The normal breeding range of Purple Gallinule is the Gulf Coast and lower Atlantic states. It has a tendency to wander northward, most often during the spring. Since 1960, there were five previous records of single birds in Iowa, all of which were first sighted in May. These records included near Cone Marsh, Louisa County in 1964, Promise City, Wayne County in 1975, Ames in 1978, near Amana in 1983, and near Burlington in 1988 (see Haldy, *Iowa Bird Life* 53:57-58; 1983, Cecil, *Iowa Bird Life* 58:115, 1988).

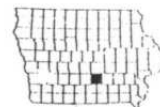
1400 Wren Road, Waterloo, Iowa, 50701



MEW GULL AT RED ROCK RESERVOIR

ANN JOHNSON

On Sunday, 19 December 1993 Russ Widner, Roy Godwin, and I were censusing the south part of Red Rock Reservoir for the annual Christmas Bird Count. While scoping a group of approximately 30 gulls at rest on the old beach at the Whitebreast Recreation Area, I noted one sleeping gull that was about 80% as large as the numerous Ring-billed Gulls. Based on information in Grant (1986), we eventually identified the bird as a first-winter Mew Gull.



The bird's head was tucked in a sleeping position, but the light body mottled with gray and the pinkish-gray legs were noticeable. The mantle and scapulars were mottled medium gray, similar to Ring-billed Gull, and the wing coverts appeared scaly gray-brown, darker than the first-year ring-bills. When the bird awoke, we compared it to the nearby Ring-billed Gulls and rejected identification as a small individual of that species. The head was rounder and smaller. The bill was slimmer and more delicate, lacking an obvious gonys. The bill was primarily black with perhaps the basal third light gray. The eye was black and prominent, the small head making the eye appear large. The nape was very dusky, the crown a bit lighter, and the aricular area was white mottled with diffuse gray. The cheek, chin, and throat were white. The breast was mottled pale gray over white. The primaries were darker than the gray mottling on the head and breast.

After the bird had preened for awhile, it took flight and circled two or three times about 100 yards in front of us before flying out of sight. The bird appeared long-winged and graceful. Its coloration was similar to first-winter Ring-billed Gulls. The outer primaries and secondaries were dark gray to black, both on the upper- and underwing. The contrast with the rest of the wing was greater on the underwing where the coverts were primarily white and only lightly mottled. The dark color on the upper wing graduated to the lighter mottled gray, more scaly at the bend of the wing. In flight the white head contrasted sharply with the gray on the upper back and on the flanks. The breast and belly appeared only lightly mottled. The tail and rump were white with a small amount of light gray markings. A conspicuous wide tail band was dark gray to black but was not quite complete. The outer feather or two, along with a narrow terminal band, appeared white.

Structurally the bird appeared to be a Mew Gull, but its coloration was confusing. The Mew Gull group consists of three subspecies seen in the United States: Mew Gull (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) of the West Coast; Common Gull (*Larus canus canus*) of Europe which is seen occasionally on the East Coast; and Kamchatka Gull (*Larus canus kamtschatschensis*) of northeastern Siberia, seen rarely in western Alaska (Tove 1993). A fourth subspecies (*Larus canus heinei*), which is darker mantled than the others, is found in central Russia and western and central Siberia (Grant 1986). Table 1 compares characteristics of the more familiar Ring-billed Gull and the three United States subspecies of *Larus canus* in first-winter plumage (adapted from Grant 1986 and Tove 1993).

Gulls of this species group seen in the central part of the country have been identified as Mew Gulls. Although I have found no precedent for this, we identified the Red Rock bird as the European subspecies (i.e., the Common Gull). The gull we observed was aged as first winter by the scaly gray-brown wing coverts. There are some differences in bill color, but without comparative experience, this field mark was not particularly useful. It appears that the two most useful characteristics are the

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Purple Gallinule

LOCATION: Dike at end of south entrance road, Sweet Marsh, Bremer County

DATE & TIME: 24 May, 1994 (3:45 PM) off and on for 20 minutes and 26 May, 1994 (7:15-8:15 AM)

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

OTHERS: Discovered by Tom Stone. With me on 24 May were Jim Scheib and Cal and Bernie Knight, and on 26 May were Jane Fuller and Randy Pinkston.

BACKGROUND: On 24 May, we were looking for this bird at the location where it was reported earlier that day by Tom Stone. We first found the bird near the dike, and in a relatively open area, but it retreated into the cattails and was not seen again for an hour. On 26 May, the bird was in view off and on for about an hour, shortly after we arrived at the location.

DESCRIPTION: The general size of this cootlike bird was smaller than an American Coot, and it also seemed slimmer and more erect. It was generally a purple color on all the underparts, head and neck, and the back and wings were more of a grayish-green. The red bill was short and pointed, and had a yellow tip. There was a pale blue area above the bill on the forehead. The legs were long and yellow, and the feet were very large and also yellow. The short gray tail showed a snowwhite rump when lifted. When in view, the bird mostly skulked among the cattails, picking at what appeared to be bugs on the surface of the water. Occasionally, it ran. It was not seen to fly, and no vocalization was heard.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Neither American Coot nor Common Moorhen show any purple on their dark gray body. The Coot has a mostly white bill, and in breeding plumage the Moorhen has red on the forehead, where this bird was pale blue.

OPTICS & CONDITIONS: 24 May was a hot and humid mid afternoon which was partly cloudy. 26 May was cool, clear, and quite windy from the north. On both occasions, the bird was 25-50 feet away, and mostly the views were to the south. Most of the viewing was with Swift Audubon 8.5 X 44 binoculars, but on several occasions the KOWA TSN4 telescope (20X) was used.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen two previously in Iowa, and have seen the bird numerous times in Florida.

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES: Field notes were made after getting back to the car, and this report was typed 26 May. No field guide was consulted.

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Purple Gallinule How Many? one

Location: Sweet Marsh W. of Tripoli

Type of habitat?: marsh

When? Date(s): May 24 & 29, 1994 time: 3:00 pm and 6:30 pm

Who? your name and address:

James Scheib, 10 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, IA 52240-9148

Others with you: Jim Fuller & Knights(24th); Sharon Scheib, Armstrongs (29th)

Others before or after you: Tom Stone before; Tim Schantz after

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.

A coot-sized bird first seen in the open then later among the vegetation. In the open, the bright yellow legs and long yellow toes were strikingly noticeable. The belly, chest, neck and head were purple. The Back and wings were brown; undertail coverts were white. Short beak was two tone red and yellow (tip to 1/3). Light blue forehead patch.

Similar species and how eliminated: Common Moorhen has white along lower edge of wing when wings are folded; does not have purple body or light blue forehead patch..

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification?

All above named birders agreed on the identification.

If yes, explain:

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

Light was behind us. View was unobstructed from about 20 yards at closest point. In all I saw it about six different times in the two visits. Sometimes mostly obstructed by grasses.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

I had seen the species in Florida in April of 1993. I see Common Moorhens yearly in Iowa.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Second edition of the National Gerographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America.

How long before field notes made? No notes made.

How long before this form completed? Ten days.

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

Details on adult **Purple Gallinule**, Porphyryla martinica

Date: May 26, 1994

Time: 07:30-08:00

Location: Sweet Marsh(south end), Bremer County, Iowa; same individual found by Tom Stone on May 24

Other Observers: Jim and Jane Fuller

Description:

Long-legged marsh skulker. Size of small chicken. Overall dark. Head and underparts brilliant iridescent purple, especially intense on head, neck, and breast. Eye black. Bill: distal 1/4 yellow, basal 3/4 red, cobalt blue frontal shield. Undertail coverts white. Back, scapulars, wings, rump, and short tail dark bronzy-green. Long legs and toes bright orange-yellow.

Behavior: It spent its time walking on mud ^{and wading} in and out of shadows beneath the high marsh reeds, feeding leisurely by picking at or just below the water's surface with its bill.

Conditions: Partly cloudy, windy, cool. Zeiss 10x40 binocular and B & L 30x scope from 25-40 feet.

Similar Species: Unmistakeable when seen this well.

Previous Experience: At least ten years' experience with Purple Gallinules as migrant and summer resident on the Upper Texas Coast.

--Randy Pinkston
526 Reno St.
Iowa City, IA
52245-3039
Ph. (319)351-0592

94-11

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

What Species? Purple Gallinule
How many? 1
Location? Sweet Marsh, Bremer Co., IA .
Type of Habitat? Marsh
When? May 26, 1994, 12:45 PM and again at 2:10 PM
Who? Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317
Others with you: None
Others before or after you:

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, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

In size, appeared to be slightly smaller than American Coot; long neck, slim body, long legs, extremely large feet. Bill red with yellow tip; shield on forehead light blue; eye dark red; head, neck, breast and belly purple; lower hind neck deep blue; back dark green; rump, wings and tail greenish black; undertail coverts white; legs and feet bright yellow.

The bird was observed walking on dead cattails; after several minutes it flew a short distance and walked out of sight into cattails. When observed later in the day it exhibited the same behavior. No vocalizations were heard.

Similar species; how eliminated: Neither American Coot or Common Moorhen have a light blue forehead shield, bright body plumage or bright yellow legs and feet.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the identification? N/A

Viewing conditions: Bright sunlight; approximately 15-20 feet away in full view; viewed with 8x42 binoculars.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: No previous experience this species; very familiar with American Coot and somewhat familiar with Common Moorhen.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Peterson and National Geographic field guides.

How long before field notes made? Immediately
How long before this form completed? 4 hours

What species? Purple Gallinule How many? 1Location? Sweet Marsh - (Bremer County)Type of habitat? Marshy area with cattails and open waterWhen? date(s): May 28, 1994 time: approx 1:30 pm for 1-2 minutesWho? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Box 65, Liscomb, Iowa 50148others with you: Beth Proescholdt, Francis Mooreothers before or after you: Tom Stone, Sr.; Armstrongs, Jim + Joyce Durbin, others

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.

We saw it come walking out of the cattails. It was the size of a Common Moorhen. It was walking with its long yellow legs and long toes. It had a purplish color to its head, neck, upper shoulders, and upper breast. It had a bright red frontal shield with a faded light blue area above the red shield. It had a yellowish tip on its bill and a dark greenish, brownish rear end and lower back.

It was walking along through the cattails by the two dead trees, came out in the open for a bit, and then was gone back into the cattails.

Similar species and how eliminated: A Common Moorhen lacks a purplish color. A Coot is essentially all dark with a white bill.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

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

Good lighting - Sun at our back or side; 25'-30' away estimated;
8x30 Binoculars

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

I have seen one other at the Amenas in Iowa.

References and persons consulted before writing description: NoneHow long before field notes made? 8:00 pm this form completed? May 30, 1994
May 28, 1994