

Little Gull Record Number: 89-38  
8 Oct 1989 Classification: A-P  
Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA  
S. Dinsmore, R. Allen, P. Allen  
IBL 60:11,15;61:85;65:83, Dinsmore 1990

DOCUMENTATIONS

Steve Dinsmore [3 Nov 1994]  
Pam Allen  
Reid Allen

PHOTOGRAPHS

Steve Dinsmore, P-0369  
Reid Allen, P-0370

LETTER

Stephen J. Dinsmore to Records Committee [Aug 1994]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:11, 15  
Records Committee: IBL 61:85; 65:83  
Dinsmore, S. J., P. Allen, and R. Allen. 1990. Little Gull at Saylorville Reservoir. IBL 60:77.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D: Good description; size, behavior, underwing pattern and head pattern are conclusive.

A-D: Not much question about this one. Features seen and nicely documented by the three observers eliminated other species. Even though lighting can play tricks with the light and dark shades of gulls, descriptions of upper wing and other features confirmed identification.

A-D: The close view of this bird eliminates the possibility of an error due misperception, seems to me to be a strong ID.

A-D: Where are the photos mentioned by Reid Allen to take this record to A-P.

A-D: A great bird to see! Good details and documentations.

A-D: Other possibilities convincingly eliminated. Well seen winter adult.

REVIEW OF PHOTOS (at meeting of 29 July 1990): A photo was examined and felt to be inconclusive. No action taken. Mention was made of possible additional photos by S. Dinsmore.

REVOTE (at meeting of 11 Nov 1990 with photos): 4 A-P, 3 A-D

REVOTE (by mail 1994): 5 A-P, 1 A-D

A-D, Although I think this photo supports the ID, it doesn't stand alone as a Little Gull. I can't see the white trailing edge. In fact, I can't determine from the photo alone that I am looking at the underside.

A-P, I voted for this before and concurr with Dinsmore's analysis.

A-P, The photograph is conclusive for Little Gull.

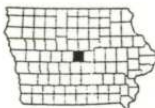
white Warbler, Northern Parula, Cape May Warbler, and Mourning Warbler. Most birds (90%) passed so high or swiftly that I could not identify the species.

Warblers were abundant all about the lake the rest of the day. I found thirty species, total, including one Connecticut. The next day I found only a few scattered flocks.

A heavy thunderstorm had passed to the north of the lake the previous evening. The morning was cool (60s), cloudy, and with a strong south wind that slowly switched to the north as a weak front passed late in the day. Since such flights often lead to heavy mortality among migrants, I checked one of the TV towers near Alleman but found only two birds dead there. Just as amazing as the tremendous numbers of migrating birds was the fact that this large flight was flying into the face of a strong south wind. I cannot readily account for this unusual behavior.

6492 James Francis Place, Johnston, IA 50131

### BIRDING MADNESS AT BROOKSIDE PARK, AMES



ANDREW S. FIX

Sunday, 20 May 1990, produced the best passerine birding I have encountered in almost five years of residence in central Iowa. Although Brookside Park is usually known for its beauty and pleasant footpaths, recent storms and flooding had transformed it into a wooded swamp that reminded me of areas I had birded along the Canadian shore of Lake Erie, including the famous Point Pelee. Many of the usual paths had to be crossed in knee-deep water or avoided entirely. About 40% of the park was physically inaccessible. The following account describes sightings from 7:00 to 10:30 a.m. and from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. Actual counts are given where available, with estimates given in parentheses. In all, I estimated that 4,500 to 5,000 individuals representing 87 species were present.

Warblers dominated the findings, with 21 species sighted. Estimates of the most numerous were Blackpoll (1,500), Ovenbird (300), Wilson's (300), Nashville (250), Common Yellowthroat (200), Black-and-white (200), American Redstart (200), Tennessee (100), Yellow-rumped (100), Chestnut-sided (60), and Yellow (50). Additional warbler species seen, but in fewer numbers, were 27 Mourning, 21 Magnolia, 15 Northern Waterthrush, 12 Orange-crowned, 11 Palm, 6 Black-throated Green, 4 Canada, and 2 Blackburnian. Several Golden-winged Warblers and Northern Parulas were heard, and about 200 waterthrushes were seen at too great a distance to identify to species.

Significant influxes of flycatchers, thrushes, and vireos were also observed. Flycatchers present included Least (800), Willow (100), and Yellow-bellied (40), 12 Eastern Wood-Pewees, and 6 Olive-sided Flycatchers. An Acadian Flycatcher was also heard. Willow Flycatchers along with Common Yellowthroats were numerous in small trees at the forest fringe. Large numbers of Swainson's (250) and Gray-cheeked (250) thrushes were seen. Vireo sightings were dominated by Solitary Vireos (75), plus 21 Yellow-throated, 15 Red-eyed, 8 Philadelphia, and several singing Warbling vireos.

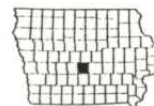
Many other common spring migrant species were seen, including all six swallow species along adjacent flooded fields. Other noteworthy findings included Rose-breasted Grosbeak (200), 15 Clay-colored Sparrows, 15 Lincoln's Sparrows, and 2 Yellow-billed Cuckoos.

Birding Brookside that day produced an ornithological sensory overload that I had not experienced since birding Point Pelee, Ontario in the mid-1980's. Interestingly, I found out later that a friend of mine had traveled from central Iowa to Point Pelee the same weekend for a Big Day. In an ironic twist of fate, he found only 58 species.

1532 Kellogg Avenue, Ames, IA 50010

### LITTLE GULL AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE, PAM ALLEN, AND REID ALLEN



At approximately 9:30 a.m. on 8 October 1989, while birding the Sandpiper Beach area of Saylorville Reservoir, we observed an adult Little Gull feeding along the shoreline with several Ring-billed Gulls. We watched the bird until 9:34 a.m. as it flew north along the east shore of the reservoir.

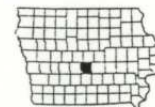
The Little Gull was noticeably smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls, perhaps half their size. It appeared slightly smaller than several nearby Bonaparte's Gulls. The upper wing was light gray with a broad white trailing edge and white wing tips. The underwings were white, except that the undersides of the flight feathers were black. The tip of the underwing was white. The dark underside of the flight feathers contrasted strongly with the rest of the wing and the white belly. The wings on the whole appeared very rounded and the bird flew with deep wingbeats, reminding us of the flight of a Short-eared Owl. The mantle was white. The tail was also white and was square-tipped. The head was also white except for the dark eye and a small, dark spot directly behind the eye. The bill was small, thin, and looked dark. Leg color was not seen. We took two distant photos which confirm our identification.

This is the first accepted record of a Little Gull in Iowa. Little Gulls have been reported around the Midwest with increasing frequency in recent years. There are recent reports from Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, and North Dakota.

4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames IA 50010 (SJD), 1601 Pleasant St., West Des Moines IA 50265 (PA, RA)

### GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE IN WEST DES MOINES

CHRISTINE A. QUINN



Toward the latter part of May as I was gardening in my backyard (which is a certified wildlife habitat with the National Wildlife Federation), I heard an unfamiliar bird song but could not locate the bird. Around 22 May 1990 I was standing on my back porch watching the finches at the finch feeder when I saw an unusual looking bird about 25 feet away underneath the quince bushes next to this feeder. The bird was

89-39

To: Members of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union Records Committee

From: Stephen J. Dinsmore  
4024 Arkansas Dr.  
Ames, IA 50014

I respectfully request that the Records Committee reevaluate the following four records in light of some clarifications of the original information. The records are:

1. (California Gull 7 Dec 1986 Saylorville Res., Polk Co.)
2. (Little Gull 27 Oct, 1 Nov 1988 Saylorville Res., Polk Co.)
- 3. (Little Gull 8 Oct 1989 Saylorville Res., Polk Co.)
4. (Red Phalarope 4 Aug 1991 Saylorville Res., Polk Co.)

#### Literature Cited

- Dinsmore, S. J. 1992. A second Red Phalarope at Saylorville Reservoir. *Iowa Bird Life* 62: 86-87.
- Dinsmore, S. J., P. Allen, and R. Allen. 1990. Little Gull at Saylorville Reservoir. *Iowa Bird Life* 60: 77.
- Grant, P. J. 1986. *Gulls: A guide to identification*. Buteo Books, Vermilion, South Dakota. 352 pages.
- Kent, T. H. 1989. Report of the Records Committee for 1988. *Iowa Bird Life* 59: 75-77.
- Kent, T. H., and R. K. Myers. 1987. Report of the Records Committee for 1986. *Iowa Bird Life* 57: 77-78.
- National Geographic Society. 1987. *Field guide to the birds of North America*. 2nd ed. National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C.

## Record #3

An adult Little Gull seen and photographed at Saylorville Reservoir on 8 October 1989 (Dinsmore et al. 1990). The record was accepted as a sight record. Given the following evidence and a reexamination of the photo, I request that the record be upgraded to A-P status.

The following are some comments on the photo. I think the committee will agree that the bird in the photo is a gull. The wing and tail shape, date, and location are all supportive of this conclusion. The rounded wings eliminate a tern, and the shape is unlike that of any shorebird, duck, or other bird. If the committee agrees the bird is a gull, then the **only** species it can be is Little Gull. No other gull shows such rounded wings and uniformly black undersides to the flight feathers. Grant (1986) describes the underwing pattern of an adult winter Little Gull as follows: "Axillaries pale gray, median and lesser underwing coverts dark gray, remainder of underwing blackish with white border on trailing edge and tip." This description couldn't better fit the bird in the photo. In the photo, the wing coverts appear white, contrasting with the black undersides of all flight feathers, except for white color at the wingtip and a narrow white trailing edge to the wing.

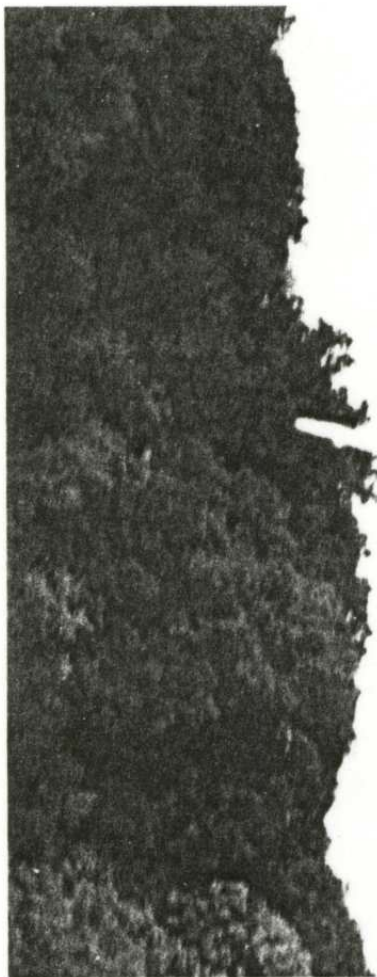
38-93



89-38

Little Gull P-0369  
Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA  
8 Oct 1989 Steve Dinsmore

84-38



## DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species? Little Gull

How Many? 1 ad.

Location? Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co.--seen off Sandpiper Beach Recreation Area

Habitat? seen flying over large reservoir with several Ring-billed Gulls

Date? 8 Oct 1989

Time? 9:30-9:34 a.m.

Observers Name and address: Steve Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames

Others who saw bird: Reid &amp; Pam Allen, Des Moines

Description of bird: At 9:30 a.m. the Allen's and I were birding the Sandpiper Beach area of Saylorville Reservoir. I was watching a group of a dozen or so Ring-billed Gulls that were feeding off the beach when a smaller gull caught my attention. I put my binoculars on the gull and immediately recognized it as an adult Little Gull, a species I am familiar with from Massachusetts. For the next four minutes, the Allen's and I watched as the bird made about three passes by the beach and then flew out of sight to the north.

I think that it was probably the flight pattern of the bird that really caught my attention. The bird flew with very deep wingbeats and in an erratic matter, much like the flight of a Short-eared Owl. The owlish flight was accentuated by the fact that this bird had somewhat rounded wings, at least more rounded than a nearby Bonaparte's Gull in direct comparison. I would have said that the bird was very close to the size of a Bonaparte's Gull, but perhaps the body was slightly shorter.

The wing pattern of this bird was very unique. The upperwing and mantle were very light gray with more white color near the tips of the primaries and along the trailing edge of the wing. The undersides of all the flight feathers were noticeably black, like the bird had a dark shadow under each wing. This dark color contrasted sharply with the lighter belly of the bird. The trailing edge of the wing and wingtip, as seen from underneath, were white. The axillars were also white.

The head, neck, belly, undertail coverts, and tail were white, except for a dark spot behind each eye. The bill was dark and was shorter and thinner than the bill of the Ring-billed Gulls it was with. I did not see the leg color. Likewise, I did not notice a dark cap on this bird, although I couldn't say for sure that it wasn't there.

Similar species and how eliminated: The bird was obviously too small to be one of the larger gulls, like a Ring-billed or a Herring gull. The very pale mantle, dark spot behind each eye, and lack of black on the top of the primaries eliminates Franklin's and Laughing gulls. The black underside of the flight feathers, pale gray mantle and wings, white wingtips, and rounded wings eliminates Bonaparte's and Sabine's gulls and kittiwakes. The square tail and wing pattern eliminates Ross' Gull. The smaller size, black underside of the flight feathers,



lack of a white "wedge" on the upper surface of the outer primaries, rounder wings, and lack of black on the upper surface of the primaries eliminates Common Black-headed Gull.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were good with a mostly clear sky and the sun about ninety degrees to our left. Estimated viewing distance was 50 yards at the closest. I used Bushnell 8x35 binoculars.

Previous experience with species: I have seen this species in Massachusetts on several occasions.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America

How long before field notes were made? 15 minutes after sighting

How long before this form was completed? 7 hours

## DOCUMENTATION FORM

SPECIES: Little Gull (*Larus minutus*)

HOW MANY: One

LOCATION: Saylorville Res., Just off Sandpiper Beach,  
Polk County, Iowa

HABITAT: Large freshwater lake

DATE: October 8, 1989

TIME & LENGTH OF  
OBSERVATION: 9:37 a.m., C.S.T. Observed for approximately  
4-7 minutes.

FIRST OBSERVATION  
MADE BY: Stephen J. Dinsmore (Ames, Iowa)

DOCUMENTER'S NAME &  
ADDRESS: Pam Allen, 1601 Pleasant Street  
West Des Moines, IA 50265

OTHERS WHO SAW BIRD: Reid Allen (address same as above)

## DESCRIPTION OF BIRD:

Very, very small gull with dark bill, whitish head with dark black ear spot and less noticeable greyish cap on back part of head. Bird was pale grey in color over entire length of upperwings (from one wingtip across mantle and back to other wingtip). Underwings were all greyish black except for white trailing edge. Wings were rounded. Tail and rump were white and underbody (breast and belly of bird) was very light colored, greyish white. White undertail. Square tail in flight. The bird was an adult in winter plumage. In flight the gull flew much more slowly-appearing, almost "floaty."

## SIMILAR SPECIES AND HOW ELIMINATED:

Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus crassirostris*): The bird observed was smaller than Bonaparte's and there was no black on wingtips; also upperwing were grey from tip to tip and there was no white leading edge on wings. Underwings on Bonaparte's are pale and bird observed had dark underwings.

Common Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*): The bird observed was smaller than Common Black-headed gull. No grey cap on Common Black-headed Gull. Black wingtips and white leading edge of wings on Black-headed gull not present on bird observed.

Ross's Gull (*Rhodestethia rosea*): The bird observed was smaller than Ross's Gull. Tail on Ross's gull is wedge-shaped and on bird observed it was square. Ear patch was much more pronounced on bird observed.

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*): The bird observed was smaller than Black-legged Kittiwake. Bill on bird observed was dark, not yellow. Wingtips were not black as on Black-legged Kittiwake.

#### VIEWING CONDITIONS AND EQUIPMENT:

It was a clear day and lighting for viewing bird could not have been better. The sun was not high enough in the sky so it was possible to have more side lighting than top lighting in viewing bird, and this made it easier to see the different colorations on the bird as it was flying. When first observed, the bird was about 30 yards away, but rapidly flew to about 75 yards away and stayed in the 70-80 yard range for most of the observation time--until it flew away. Viewed with Bausch and Lomb 8x36 Custom binoculars.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH SPECIES: None.

REFERENCES CONSULTED: Field Guide to the Birds of North America. National Geographic Society. Second edition, second printing. 1988.

Iowa Birds. James J. Dinsmore, et al. The Iowa State University Press. 1984.

The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding. Vol. 2. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1983.

Seabirds: An Identification Guide. Peter Harrison. Houghton Mifflin Company. 1983.

The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds. John K. Terres. Alfred A.

Knopf, Inc. 1982.

HOW LONG BEFORE

FIELD NOTES MADE: As bird was being observed.

HOW LONG BEFORE THIS

FORM COMPLETED: October 8-16, 1989.

DOCUMENTATION

SPECIES: Little Gull (*larus minutus*)

HOW MANY: One

LOCATION: Sandpiper Beach, Saylorville Lake, Iowa

HABITAT: Sand beach & inlet on large freshwater lake

DATE: October 8, 1989

TIME: Approx. 9:30 A.M.

OBSERVER'S NAME & ADDRESS: Reid Allen, 1601 Pleasant Street  
West Des Moines, IA 50265

OTHERS WHO SAW BIRD: Pam Allen, Steve Dinsmore

DESCRIPTION OF BIRD: Small gull. Blackish under the wings, grey above with a dark cap. Rounded wings. Flew at times like a "floater" as it hunted the mouth of the inlet at Sandpiper Beach, and yet it flew strongly as it seemed to decide to head west and north after two passes at the inlet.

SIMILAR SPECIES AND HOW ELIMINATED: Distinctly smaller than Bonaparte's Gulls which were also observed in the same area a few minutes before this bird was seen. The black coloration beneath the wings was very apparent and was definitely black or dark, dark grey and solid as opposed to the light grey on Bonaparte Gulls and medium grey on Franklin's.

VIEWING CONDITIONS AND EQUIPMENT: Clear weather. Viewed with Bushnell Custom 8x36 binoculars. Camera was Minolta X-700 with Minolta MD 300mm Telephoto. Film was Fuji Realta 100 ASA.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH SPECIES: None.

REFERENCES USED: Seabirds - An Identification Guide. Peter Harrison. 1985 Revised Edition.

A Field Guide to the Birds East of the Rockies. Roger T. Peterson. 1980 Fourth Edition.

Field Guide to the Birds of North America. National Geographic Society. 1988 Second edition, second printing.

Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding. 1983.

HOW LONG BEFORE FIELD NOTES MADE: As we were viewing bird.

HOW LONG BEFORE THIS FORM COMPLETED: Completed on October 16, 1989