

Laughing Gull
10 May 1996
Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co., IA
Stephen J. Dinsmore
IBL 66:104, 67:82, P-0513, Dinsmore 1998

Record Number: 96-30
Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATION

Steve Dinsmore (note), 4014 Arkansas Dr, Ames 50024 [4/6/97]
Stephen J. Dinsmore, 12 Nov 1997 [second review]

PHOTOGRAPH

Stephen J. Dinsmore, P-0513

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 66:104
Records Committee: IBL 67:82, 68:87
Dinsmore, S. J. 1998. Laughing Gulls in central Iowa. IBL
68:21.

VOTE: 3 A-P, 4 NA

NA, From the photograph I cannot eliminate first-summer Franklin's Gull, which may closely resemble adult Laughing Gull.

NA, the photo by itself is not diagnostic.

NA, Dark underwings are visible, but adult Little Gull has them also. Wings do seem to be long and pointed rather than short and round. The photo is not close and clear enough to be diagnostic.

A-P, I don't believe the photo is diagnostic by itself but the dark underwing is supportive of the written documentation.

NA, With the lighting on this bird the way it is this could just as easily be a Little Gull, no documentation to help out with identification of this bird.

A-P, We have no written description of this bird. The photograph shows a flying "black-headed" gull with white tail seen from below. The underwing is all dark. I think it is blacker toward the tip, but without demarcation of the black. It is possible that a thin tail band could be concealed in the photo. Given this photo as an unknown, I would not be able to identify it to species. Even though the underwing could be in shadow, I do not think Franklin's or Bonaparte's gulls could appear this dark. The long, pointed wings and relatively large head argue against one of the small "black-headed" gulls. Whether the evidence is enough for a species that is currently classified as Casual in Iowa is probably academic, and I could go either way.

A-P, The photo shows a black-headed, long-winged gull with apparent "dark underwings", and no visible wing windows or pale areas in the primaries. These features eliminate Franklin's Gull, which, in alternate plumage would show pale areas in the primaries, Little Gull, which would have much shorter wings relative to the body, and Bonaparte's and Black-headed Gulls, which would show white undersides in the outer primaries.

RE-VOTE (by mail after receipt of documentation and explanation of photo, Dec 1997): 4 A-P, 2 A-D, 1 NA

A-P, Documentation should clinch this one, although I think with careful study the photo is pretty diagnostic for Laughing Gull.

A-P, The documentation helps determine size and eliminates Little Gull. The point about the 2-toned underwing is a bit subtle for me. An overexposed print would help bring this out. I agree that the photo eliminates Franklin's Gull.

NA, Photo shows wing length and shape which clearly eliminates Franklin's Gull and Little Gull. However photo does not eliminate Black-headed Gull, as it appears underwing is in shadow.



Laughing Gull 96-30 P-0513
Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA
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Eurasian Tree Sparrows nest more often in holes in trees, rather than in or on buildings, but readily accept nest boxes (Anderson 1978, Summers-Smith 1995). Where they occur with House Sparrows (*P. domesticus*), Eurasian Tree Sparrows may be displaced unless safe nest sites are available. In Missouri, nest boxes with an entrance diameter of 29 mm were used by Eurasian Tree Sparrows whereas nest boxes with larger diameters were used by House Sparrows (Anderson 1978). The nest box that was used here, though having a large entrance, seemed distant enough from farmsteads to preclude House Sparrows (PEL). Assuming an incubation period of 12 days and nestling period of 14 days (Anderson 1978), this nesting attempt probably began about 1 June. In comparison with Missouri studies (Anderson 1978), this nesting may well have been a second brood.

Our visits to Burlington are infrequent, but checking the Tama Road-levee area is a usual activity, often successful in seeing Eurasian Tree Sparrows. One had been seen near this same box during a visit earlier this year (6 April 1997). Tama Road parallels the levee and Mississippi River north of Burlington. This area consists of bottomland woodland, levee, and numerous river cabins (generally east of the road) and row crops (to west). Numerous bluebird boxes have been placed throughout this flood plain east of Highway 99. Most likely, nest sites selected by Eurasian Tree Sparrows have been more inconspicuous than the nest we found. This nest serves as another indication of an established and growing population in southeastern Iowa.

LITERATURE CITED

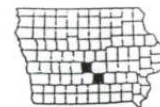
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Field Museum, Roosevelt Road at Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60605-2496 (PEL); and 18346 Page Court, Homewood, IL. 60430-3320

LAUGHING GULLS IN CENTRAL IOWA

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

During 1996, I saw three Laughing Gulls in central Iowa. Here, I provide details of each sighting and comment on their status in Iowa.



On 10 May 1996, I observed an adult Laughing Gull at Saylorville Reservoir in Polk County. The bird was resting on Sandpiper Beach in the company of Ring-billed Gulls and Caspian Terns. I watched and photographed the bird from 10:24 to 10:40 a.m. and noted the following. The bird was slightly smaller than a Ring-billed Gull and much slimmer. The bird was in alternate plumage with a black hood, faint white eye crescents, and blood-red bill. The mantle and upperwings were dark gray except for black primaries. The underparts and tail were white. The legs were black. In flight, I noted that the undersides of the outer primaries were black and there was no white bar on the upperwing separating the black primaries from the gray upperwing.

On 17 August 1996, Jim Sinclair, Ray Cummins, and I were birding Runnells Wildlife Area in Marion County. We were walking along the main dike when I saw a smaller gull flying with Ring-billed Gulls. I recognized the bird immediately as a juvenile Laughing Gull. We studied the bird at close range intermittently from 9:00 to 10:35 a.m. The bird was slightly smaller and slimmer-winged than a Ring-billed Gull. The bird was almost entirely brown, except for a paler face, throat, and belly, and black primaries. The black bill was rather long and slightly drooped. The eye was dark with prominent white eye crescents, especially around the posterior end of the eye. The mantle and scapulars were edged with pale buff giving the bird a somewhat scaly appearance. In flight, there was a broad, black terminal tail band. The legs appeared black, and the bird seemed long-legged compared to a Ring-billed Gull. I aged the bird as a juvenile because of the extensive brown color on the body and wings.

Finally, on 5 September 1996, I saw a juvenile Laughing Gull near the north end of the Highway 14 bridge at Red Rock Reservoir in Marion County. This bird's description matched that of the juvenile seen earlier at Runnells Wildlife Area. I watched the bird from 12:45 to 1:10 p.m. and photographed it. It is possible this was the same bird seen on 17 August.

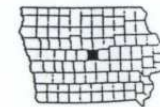
None of these birds were relocated after the initial sighting. Records of Laughing Gulls in Iowa continue to increase as observers become more aware of the possibility of finding them. There are a few records from spring (April-May), but most are from fall (July-October) with a peak from early August to mid-September.

612 1/2 W. Magnolia, Fort Collins, CO 80521

WESTERN Tanager IN STORY COUNTY

KEVIN HEALY

On the afternoon of 8 May 1997 my neighbor, M. J. Hatfield, called to alert me to the presence of a Western Tanager near my home. Shortly after 4:00 p.m. an adult male Western Tanager in breeding plumage visited one of our feeders, sampling oranges slices set out to attract Baltimore Orioles. I observed



96-30

13 November 1997

Tom Kent
211 Richards St.
Iowa City, IA 52246

Tom-

The purpose of this letter is to address three records of birds in Iowa. First, I noticed that one of my Laughing Gull records (17 August 1996, record #96-56) is given a status of A-P. I assume the photo is the one I took on 5 September. If so, why are the two records being lumped? And why is the 5 September date not mentioned? I stated in my report that they were possibly the same bird, but given the regularity of this species in Iowa the last few years I think it would make more sense to treat them as separate records. I think there is much stronger evidence that the Pomarine Jaegers and Saylorville and Red Rock last fall involved some (all?) of the same birds, and those records are being treated separately.

A few comments regarding the other Laughing Gull record (10 May 1996, Saylorville). I would hope that those committee members who thought the bird was a Little Gull re-examine the photo. The entire underwing is not dark; only the undersides of the primaries. This is evident from the lack of contrast between the belly and the axillars and underwing coverts. This is not typical of adult Little Gull. However, because the record should be a part of the literature, I have enclosed a brief description of the bird for review. I hope that in the near future, only brief details (if any at all) would be required for Laughing Gulls during the expected period of occurrence.

Finally, I think my Anhinga record needs a little support. It appears the Iowa Records Committee is in effect saying that Anhingas cannot be identified in flight. I believe this is entirely incorrect. I stated that I have experience with both species in flight and that I recognized the bird immediately as an Anhinga. In my documentation, I stated, "I have seen thousands of Double-crested Cormorants and I have never seen one soar in this manner." I stand by this statement in its entirety. I never said that cormorants don't soar. They frequently do, but never match the appearance of this bird which included a thin, outstretched neck with a headless appearance and a long fanned tail clearly longer than the neck/head (see documentation). Do committee members understand that while behavioral characters and appearance can change depending on viewing conditions, weather, etc., structural characters are much less variable? The bird I described couldn't have been anything but an Anhinga. The flight behavior further supports the structural characters noted. I stated unequivocally that the neck was outstretched and that "the tail was noticeably longer than the neck..". Even a Double-crested Cormorant with the neck kinked will have a tail that is always shorter than the length of the neck. With the neck outstretched, the neck will always be longer than the length of the tail. This is due to the long-tailed nature of Anhingas. "In twelve specimens... average (tail) length was 24.4 centimeters (extremes: 21.5 and 26.0 centimeters). In nine cormorants ... tail length was 14.2 centimeters (extremes: 13.0 and 16.0 centimeters)." (Owre, O. T. 1967. Adaptations for locomotion and feeding in the Anhinga and the Double-crested Cormorant. Ornithological Monographs No. 6. The American Ornithologists' Union.). Owre (1967) further noted that tail length comprised 28.7% of the total length of an Anhinga but just 18.9% of that of a Double-crested Cormorant. I was unable to find similar measurements for neck length. I also searched unsuccessfully for a photo of a Double-crested Cormorant in flight showing a tail that was longer than the neck. Short of being a mutant Double-crested Cormorant that was missing a few neck vertebrae, the bird I described was an Anhinga. In my opinion, comments by the outside reviewer are basically worthless. This record should have been sent to a reviewer

96-30

who is familiar with this species, not someone with limited experience who lives in Minnesota. Comments by the Minnesota records committee indicate that one of their records was later rejected when the original observer withdrew the record because of personal doubts. I note that their comments include the following: "a long tail about the same length as the head and neck". Also, they apparently never considered the possibility of a Double-crested Cormorant, something I did consider. I think it is a real shame that the IOU Records Committee takes skepticism to such ridiculous ends.

Finally, I noticed in the Records Committee report for 1996 that the Little Gull at Black Hawk Lake in April was a juvenile. Was this a mistake? Juvenal plumage in Little Gulls is lost by late fall, so a young bird in April can't be in juvenile plumage.

Sincerely,

96-30

November 29, 1997

Stephen J. Dinsmore
612 ½ Magnolia St.
Fort Collins, CO 80521

Dear Steve,

Thanks for you comments on records for 1996.

We will have another look at the Anhinga record.

I don't understand your comment about the Laughing Gull record #96-56—both 17 Aug and 5 Sep are mentioned. As to lumping or separating, our policy has been for me to make a judgment, which can be overturned by majority vote or more information from the observers. It is often difficult to decide. As long as the facts are preserved, I don't see that it makes much difference. I believe I was influenced by your comment, by the fact that both sightings were of juveniles, and by previous experience of gulls moving from Runnells to Red Rock.

Thanks for the documentation on the spring Laughing Gull #96-30. It will be circulated with the next batch of records. I think the interesting aspect of this record is whether the photo is diagnostic. Most of the committee members couldn't identify it from the photo alone—it would be interesting to test it on a bunch of gull watchers. I think the comments on Little Gull are spurious.

As to review of Laughing Gulls, we decided a few years ago to review all records of Casual species. As you know, we have defined Casual as seen in 9 of 10 years or in 8 of 10 years with majority vote for Casual (or Regular). We have rarely made an exception, such as with House Finch and Great-tailed Grackle, where the trend was very evident at an earlier time. As it turns out, your Laughing Gull would have been the one to make it 8 of 10 years. It is now 9 of 10 with a 1997 record, so this species will become Regular when we next consider updates of status.

I find juvenile Laughing Gulls very easy to identify, but older birds are not so easy and depend on how well they are seen—so I would personally document them. Although I would take your word for a Laughing Gull, I don't have the same degree of confidence with most Iowa observers. The other advantage of documentations is that they are placed in a file by species, so they will be easily accessed for future review. Further, details would have probably sufficed for #96-30, but you had an "*" on your field report and no details, which suggested to me that you forgot to include a documentation.

I hope all goes well with you in Colorado.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Kent, Secretary
IOU Records Committee
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, IA 52246

96-30

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Laughing Gull

Number: 1 alternate adult

Location: Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co., IA

Habitat: resting on beach with other gulls

Date: 10 May 1996

Time: 12:45-1:10 p.m.

Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 612 1/2 W. Magnolia St. Fort Collins, CO 80521

Others who saw bird: none

Description of bird(s): When I arrived at Sandpiper Beach, I quickly scanned a small flock of gulls and recognized one bird as an adult Laughing Gull. The bird was with about 100 Ring-billed and Franklin's Gulls. This bird was slightly smaller than a Ring-billed Gull, but larger than a Franklin's. Overall size was closer to that of a Ring-billed Gull. The bill was deep red in color, about the length of the bill of a Ring-billed, and had a clear "droop" to it. The bird had a solid black hood and faint white eye crescents, most noticeable behind the eye. The mantle was dark gray, slightly darker than that of a Ring-billed or Franklin's Gull. The underparts were white. The legs appeared dark and were the same length as those of nearby Ring-billed Gulls. In flight, I noted that the upperwing was mostly dark gray with black in the primaries. There was no line of white color separating black from gray on the upperwing. The tip of the underwing was very dark, especially when compared to several Franklin's Gulls that were in flight with this bird. The tail was white. Based on these features, I concluded the bird was an adult in alternate (third alternate) plumage.

Similar species and how eliminated: The bird was clearly one of the "hooded" gulls. The combination of size, mantle color, and upperwing pattern eliminates all of the hooded gulls except for Franklin's Gull. The larger size, less obvious white eye crescents, larger and longer bill, and extensively dark tips to the underwings eliminated Franklin's Gull.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with the sun overhead. Estimated viewing distance was initially 100 meters, but I later approached to within 50 meters. I used a 20-60x spotting scope and 10x42 binoculars.

Previous experience with species: I am very familiar with Laughing Gulls, having spent the previous two months on the coast of North Carolina where the species is abundant. I am also familiar with Franklin's Gulls (several of which were present at the time) from birding in Iowa and throughout the Midwest.

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

How long before field notes made: brief notes written after sighting

How long before this form completed: 12 November 1997

Laughing Gull

10 May 1996

Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co., IA

Stephen J. Dinsmore

IBL 66:104, P-0513

Record Number: 96-30

Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Steve Dinsmore (note), 4014 Arkansas Dr, Ames 50024 [4/6/97]

PHOTOGRAPH

Stephen J. Dinsmore, P-0513

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 66:104

Records Committee: IBL

VOTE: 3 A-P, 4 NA

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96-30

7/5/96

Tom -

Enclosed is a slide of the adult Laughing Gull I saw at Saylorville in May.
You may have the slide. Not a great photo, but clearly shows dark underwings.

Stan

96-30

7/5/96

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Stan