

Black-headed Gull

3 Nov 1996

Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA

*Ann Johnson

IBL 67:22, 82

Record Number: 96-57

Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Ann Johnson, 532 120th Ave., Norwalk 50211

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 67:22

Records Committee: IBL 67:82

VOTE: 5 A-D, 2 NA

A-D, Dark under wing and size eliminate Bonaparte's Gull.

A-D, Upperwing and underwing pattern should eliminate other similar sized gulls.

A-D, While distance and light could certainly play tricks on underwing coloration, the jizz of this bird's flight in comparison with Bonaparte's is conclusive, in my opinion.

NA, Ken Brock expresses the problem well: "Black-headed Gull:- No! Although the gull was initially 100 feet away, it is unclear how far the bird was when it finally banked and the dark underwing was noted. At great distance I am concerned that shadow might have been mistaken as dark underwing. The other marks, size and flight style, are subjective."

NA, Contrasting light could have given appearance of dark underwings. No head or soft part characteristic seen. Brief view in tricky light conditions.

RE-VOTE (by mail): 4 D-A, 3 NA

A-D, The jizz and size in comparison to Bonaparte's Gull is conclusive. The underwing color is supportive, but not conclusive because of light and distance.

NA, It's possible that the underwings appeared dark at that distance because of the lighting.

A-D, The problem is the dark underwing and the distance and lighting when it was observed.

A-D, Although the bird had flown some distance away before it banked, the underwing coloration was observed in direct comparison to a Bonaparte's at the same distance and angle. If shadow affected this bird, it should have also affected the Bonaparte's.

NA, Viewing time and angle too tricky for me to be sure.

A-D, Size and upper wing coloration makes this a Black-headed Gull. Black underwings are just an additional field mark for this bird that strengthens this record, this field mark alone doesn't make this record unacceptable.

NA, I have been misled by contrasty light with gulls many times -- more than a brief view is needed.

96-57

**DOCUMENTATION FORM
UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTINGS IN IOWA**

Species: Black-headed Gull

Location: Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA

Habitat: Large lake

Date: 3 November 1996 **Time:** 12:30 pm **Length of observation:** 3 minutes

Name and Address: Ann Johnson, 532 120th Avenue, Norwalk, IA 50211

Other Observers: none

Background: I had just been scoping the gulls and cormorants on Robert's Creek Lake from the boat ramp. I turned back onto the pavement headed east when a "large" Bonaparte's Gull flew across the road in front of me and headed out into the main lake. I pulled off the road and followed it through binoculars as it went out into the middle of the lake. I also observed the bird later in the afternoon from the south side at Whitebreast.

Viewing conditions (light, distance, optics): Sunny with the sun fairly high in the sky. Although I was looking towards the sun as I followed the bird out across the open water, I was above it on the road and not looking directly into poor light. The bird was initially about 100 feet in front of me and was observed through Zeiss 7X42 binoculars.

Description of bird: This gull was nearly Ring-billed size with the same colored mantle. The head was white as was the roundish tail. I did not see enough of the head to note bill color nor head markings. The leading edge of the upper wing was brilliant white, contrasting with the gray of the mantle. There was a small edge of black on the trailing edge of the primaries and outer secondaries. As it flew, the wing beats had a different "feel" from Bonaparte's, deeper and not as fluttery. As the bird flew out across the lake, this characteristic was noted in direct comparison with Bonaparte's. I stayed on the bird until it was well out on the lake. It finally banked where I could see the underwing. The inner primaries were dark, much darker than the Bonaparte's at a similar distance and angle.

Similar species/discussion: Only one other North American gull has a leading white edge to the upperwing - Bonaparte's. Size and jizz helped differentiate this bird from the Bonaparte's, but the dark underwing eliminated the smaller species.

Previous experience: Have only seen one Black-headed previously but have years of experience with Bonaparte's

References consulted: National Geographic Guide; Grant's Gulls; Harrison's Seabirds