

Black-headed Gull Record Number: 94-41
17 Nov 1994 Classification: A-D
Big Creek L., Polk Co., IA
*Ray Cummins, *S. Dinsmore, *J. Dinsmore
IBL 65:15, 82, Dinsmore 1997

DOCUMENTATIONS

Ray Cummins ? (17 Nov) [2/23/95*]
Stephen J. Dinsmore (21, 23 Nov), 4024 Arkansas Dr, Ames 50014 [6/26/95*]
Jim Dinsmore (23 Nov), 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames 40014

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 65:15
Records Committee: IBL 65:82
Dinsmore, S. J. 1997. Black-headed Gull at Big Creek Lake. IBL 67:131

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Nice to be able to compare directly with Bonaparte's and Little.
A-D, Descriptions very good, eliminate other possibilities.

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After submission of this report to the Iowa Records Committee, Bangma had opportunity to directly compare Ring-billed and California gulls. Not only did this bear out the tarsus/culmen length mentioned above, but he noted that the wing projection overlapped as well. Also, in the course of feeding a mixed group of gulls, he noted that the ring-bills in that group dragged their wings on the pavement more frequently than the Californias. While this may only apply to some feeding behavior, it certainly does bring the conventional wisdom into question.

One of the most striking things about the bird was the nearly white median wing coverts. We initially thought the bird had molted these feathers, displaying the white bases of underlying feathers. Under closer examination we felt that the feathers were in fact present, but were extremely faded. Later that day, we examined photographs in Grant (1982) and found a similar appearance in photos 476 and 479. In fact, we were struck by the overall similarity of #479 to our bird, allowing for the progression of molt.

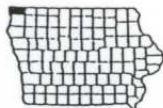
We thank the staff of the American Museum of Natural History, and in particular Helen Hays and Joe DiCostanzo, for their help in allowing access to the gull collection.

717 Anderson Ave., #8N, Cliffside Park, NJ 07010 and 532 120th Ave., Norwalk, IA 50211

CHESTNUT-COLLARED LONGSPUR IN LYON COUNTY

DENNIS HENRICKSON

Chestnut-collared Longspurs nest in southeastern South Dakota and extreme western Minnesota. They can be expected in western Iowa during migration. When an April snow brought large flocks of Lapland Longspurs to the Gruver area, I thought it time to check out northwestern Iowa for Chestnut-collared Longspurs.



Early on the morning of 11 April 1997, I set out, getting to Larchwood at 8:45 a.m. Taking highway K16 out of town, I encountered several large flocks of longspurs but could find no Chestnut-collared Longspurs among them. Turning around at the Minnesota border, I back tracked two miles and turned west on a gravel road. I had gone about three miles when it happened. A lone bird was on the side of the road about 40 feet ahead of me. I stopped and with my 7 x 40 binoculars, viewed the bird through the front windshield. Binoculars can spook birds and, after a few seconds, the bird flew away. It was a male in breeding plumage. I did get a good look at the ventral part of the bird as it was facing me. The large black ventral area was framed in white, and the throat appeared light. As it flew, the black triangle in the tail pattern was obvious. I tried for 15 to 20 minutes to relocate the bird without success. Then I wrote down my observations.

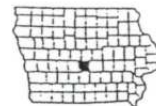
I looked for more Chestnut-collared Longspurs for the next several hours, but I could find only Lapland Longspurs and Horned Larks.

1371 450th Avenue, Estherville, IA 51334

BLACK-HEADED GULL AT BIG CREEK LAKE

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

On 21 November 1994, I saw an adult Black-headed Gull at Big Creek Lake in Polk County. I watched the bird from 7:32-9:30 a.m. and again from 4:07-4:50 p.m. The bird had been reported earlier on 17 November by Ray Cummins. The bird was feeding with about 100 Bonaparte's Gulls opposite the beach area of the lake. It was clearly larger and longer-winged than the Bonaparte's. The most striking feature was the extensive dark color on the underside of the wing. Specifically, the undersides of the outer two primaries were white, with the undersides of the remaining flight feathers blackish, gradually becoming dark gray in the inner secondaries. Another feature noted was the bright red bill, which was slightly longer and thicker than that of a Bonaparte's. The legs were also bright red. The head, underparts, and tail were white except for a small black spot just behind each eye. The upperwing pattern was similar to that of a Bonaparte's, except that the gray color was much paler. This was especially evident when the bird was perched with Bonaparte's Gulls. This individual did not seem quite as large relative to Bonaparte's as other Black-headed Gulls I have seen, but it was still obviously larger. Based on the wing and head patterns, I aged the bird as an adult in basic plumage.



I observed the bird again on 23 November, but not thereafter. The number of Bonaparte's Gulls dropped dramatically after the 23rd, and the Black-headed Gull presumably departed with them. This represents the fourth record of a Black-headed Gull in Iowa. Other records were a basic adult on 2, 4 November 1989 at Saylorville Reservoir, Polk County (S. Dinsmore, *Iowa Bird Life* 63:53-54, 1993), an alternate adult on 2 August 1994 at Spirit Lake, Dickinson County (S. Dinsmore, *Iowa Bird Life* 66:27-29, 1996), and an alternate adult and a juvenile from 2-12 August 1994 at the Kettleton Waterfowl Production Area, Dickinson County (S. Dinsmore, *Iowa Bird Life* 66:27-29, 1996).

612 112 W. Magnolia, Fort Collins, CO 80521

FIRST RECORD OF A NEOTROPIC CORMORANT FOR IOWA

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

On 4 May 1996, I arrived at the Little River Recreation Area in Decatur County. At 2:25 p.m., I noticed a flock of about 75 cormorants perched in trees roughly 500 meters distant. I quickly examined each bird, knowing there was a possibility of finding a Neotropic Cormorant. At the great distance, none of the birds really stood out, but I kept coming back to one bird that seemed a bit smaller, slimmer, and longer-tailed. At 2:45 p.m., at a distance of about 200 meters, the bird in question was easily identified as an adult Neotropic Cormorant. The bird was only slightly shorter than a Double-crested, but was proportioned much differently. The tail was about 50% longer, and the bird seemed slimmer-necked and smaller-headed. The bill was slightly shorter, thinner, and darker than that of a Double-crested. The throat patch was also smaller and duller, not bright orange like all nearby Double-crested Cormorants. The body, wings, and tail were a glossy brown/black color, similar to those of a Double-crested. The lower portion of the



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DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Sightings in Iowa

What Species? Common Black-headed Gull

How Many? 1

Location? Big Creek State Park Polk Co.

Type of Habitant? Open water

When? date(s): 11-17 1994

Time: 10:30am to 10:36am

Others with you: Dennis Thompson

Circumstance? I had been looking for the Little Gull when I noticed a lighter mantled gull setting with two Bonaparte's gulls which I immediately identified as a Common Black-headed Gull.

Description: The setting gull in direct comparison to the two Bonaparte's was lighter mantled, larger, whiter headed, the bill was longer and heavier, and the bill was reddish black not pure black like the Bonaparte's. In flight the gull had the same upper wing pattern as the Bonaparte's. The under wing had a striking two outer primaries which were white and contrasted sharply compared to the black inner primaries. The gull also had a white tail and red legs. I did not note the tailing edge to the wing or the color of the underwing secondaries during the sighting. The underwing was not totally black like the Little Gull.

Similar species: see above

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the identification? No

Viewing conditions: I had a very excellent look in perfect light from 75 yds with a kowa spotting scope. The flying bird was 75-200 yds.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: very familiar with Bonaparte's. Little gull seen same day.

References: National Geographic after sighting to confirm ID.

How long before field notes made? 5 minutes This form completed? 2 wks

Ray Cummings?

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DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Common Black-headed Gull

Number: 1 adult

Location: Big Creek L., Polk Co., IA

Habitat: large lake

Date: 21,23 November 1994

Time: 7:32-9:30 a.m. and 4:07-4:50 p.m. on 11/21, 8:02-9:49 a.m. on 11/23

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

Others who saw bird: Susan B. Grove, Jim Dinsmore

Description of bird(s): I first observed the bird feeding with about a hundred Bonaparte's Gulls opposite the beach area of the lake. The bird was clearly larger and longer-winged than the Bonaparte's. The most striking feature was the extensive dark color on the underside of the wing. Specifically, the undersides of the outer two primaries were white, with the undersides of the remaining flight feathers blackish, gradually becoming dark gray in the inner secondaries. Other features noted were a bright red bill, slightly longer and thicker than that of a Bonaparte's. The legs were also bright red. The head, underparts, and tail were white except for a small black spot just behind each eye. The upperwing pattern was very similar to that of a Bonaparte's (white outer primaries, black on outer edge of outermost primary, black tips to most primaries, remainder of upperwing gray), except that the gray color was much paler. This was especially evident when the bird was perched with Bonaparte's Gulls. This individual did not seem quite as large relative to Bonaparte's as other Common "Black-headed Gulls I've seen, but it was still obviously larger in size. Based on the wing and head patterns, I aged the bird as an adult in basic plumage.

Similar species and how eliminated: The combination of size, wing pattern, and red bill eliminates other gulls, especially Bonaparte's and Little gulls (both of which were present within days of this sighting)

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were very good with the sun behind me under clear skies (11/21) and cloudy skies (11/23). Estimated viewing distance was mostly around 100-250 meters, though I was as close as 25-30 meters on a couple of occasions. I used Leica 10x42 binoculars and a Kowa 20-60x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: Have seen this species twice before in Iowa, as well as numerous times in Massachusetts and North Carolina.

References consulted: Grant Gulls: A guide to identification

How long before field notes made: none written

How long before this form completed: completed 27 November 1994

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DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species Common Black-headed Gull How many? one
Location? Big Creek Lake, Polk County
Type of habitat? freshwater lake
When? date(s): 23 November 1994 Time: . 9:45 to 10:15 a.m.
Who? your name and address Jim Dinsmore
4024 Arkansas Drive, Ames, IA 50014
Others with you Steve Dinsmore, Susan Grove
Others before and after you Dennis Thompson and others

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also describe voice and behavior.

A small gull. Compared side by side with a Bonaparte's and Ring-billed gulls; this bird was about 10% larger than the Bonapartes and perhaps 20-25% smaller than the ring-bills.

Resting on the water, the bird appeared mostly white; a small gull resting high on the water. The most obvious field characters were a small black smudge behind the eye (the rest of the head and neck were white) and a red bill. The bill appeared to be slightly larger (relatively) than that of the Bonaparte's Gull. The mantle was white to light gray and appeared to be slightly lighter colored than that of the Bonaparte's Gull

In flight, the most obvious characters were the bright white color on the upper side of several of the outer primaries, giving it a white flash when it flew. More importantly, the underside of most of the outer primaries (but not the outermost ones) was dark colored, providing a dark contrast to the underside of the wing. This was visible when the bird turned or banked and to some extent, on the downstroke of the wing. I also thought that the wingbeat was somewhat slower and deeper than that of the Bonaparte's Gull, of which there were many in flight around this bird.

Similar species and how eliminated:

The white on the upper primaries separates it from most gulls. The combination of the red bill and the dark on the underside of the primaries eliminates Little Gull and Bonaparte's Gull.

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Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification?

If yes, explain: Not that I know of.

Viewing conditions: lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: Clear sky and sun somewhat overhead, good viewing conditions. When in flight, it was perhaps 500 yards or more away but I was able to pick it out several times and follow it to pick out the flight characteristics. When perched, it was about 75 yards away. Under both situations, I was using a spotting scope at 15 power to view the bird.

Previous experience with this species and similar ones:

Have seen this species once before. Saw the Little Gull at this site the previous week and had hundreds of Bonaparte's Gulls to compare it with while I was searching for this bird.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

National Geographic and Robbins field guides

How long before field notes made?

this form completed? Completed 2 hours after I saw the bird

Mail original form to field editor for this season.