

Great Black-backed Gull  
30 Nov 1986  
Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA  
\*S. Dinsmore, \*Martsching  
IBL 57:17, 78

Record Number: 86-14  
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Steve Dinsmore  
Paul Martsching

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 57:17  
Records Committee: IBL 57:78

VOTE: 7-III

III, Good descriptions and properly aged.

III, Description of this bird as being 2nd winter plumaged bird with completely white head, neck, breast, tail coverts and base to tail with no blackness in the mantle bothers me. A second winter bird that is not streaked on the head or breast seems like it should have some black in the mantle. This bird apparently did not have the blackening of the mantle. The rest of the description from both observers is consistent with this species. With a bicolored bill and large size I do not see that it could be any other species than Great Black-backed Gull.

III, I am puzzled that this probably 2nd winter gull didn't show and "clear" black on mantle but possible this bird was just emerging from first-summer to second-winter. Other marks overshadowed this doubt, however.

III, Saw bird fitting this description at Red Rock Res. 3 Dec.

III, Description adequate. Sketch shows "saddleback" effect well.

## Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation

by the Records Committee

of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: *Great Black-backed Gull*DATE SEEN: *11-30-86*SITE OF OBSERVATION: *Saylorville Res*OBSERVERS: *S. Dinsmore, P. Martsching*DATE OF REVIEW: *4-3-87*METHOD OF REVIEW: *Vote via mail*CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: *III*

## COMMENTS:

*While some committee members questioned the bird's age, all agreed the ID was correct.*

The opinions expressed here are based on the information available to the Committee and should not necessarily preclude an alternate interpretation by those who observed the bird firsthand.

Any action may be re-reviewed upon submission of additional evidence.

## Explanation of Classification:

- I = labeled, diagnostic specimen, photograph, or recording available for review by the Committee
- II = acceptable sight record documented independently by 3 or more observers
- III = acceptable sight record documented by 1 or 2 observers
- IV = probably correct record, but not beyond doubt
- V = record with insufficient evidence to judge
- VI = probably incorrect identification, escapee, or otherwise unacceptable record

Classification is based on the highest category agreed upon by six of seven committee members.

## DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species? Great Black-backed Gull

How Many? 1 2nd winter bird

Location? Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co. (near visitors center)

Habitat? large reservoir

Date? 30 Nov-1 Dec 1986

Time? approximately 4:00-4:15 P.M. on 30 Nov and 3:55-4:08 P.M. on 1 Dec

Observers Name and address: Steve Dinsmore, Ames

Others who saw bird: Paul Martsching

Description of bird: I first noticed the bird because of its larger size and whiter appearance as compared to numerous Herring Gulls. The bird also appeared larger-headed than a Herring Gull. The bill was much heavier than a Herring Gull's bill and was bicolored; pinkish at the base with a dark tip. The head was white and had no obvious streaking or speckling. The rest of the bird's underparts were also white without any speckling. Herring Gulls in 2nd winter plumage should have brown streaking on the head and underparts. On the swimming bird, the light back was heavily speckled with dark brown and blackish spots. Herring Gulls in 2nd winter plumage should show a grayish mantle. In flight, the rump was also white without other markings. The tail was mostly white with a dark band 1-2 inches wide near the tip. The very tip of the tail showed a narrow white band. In flight, I could see that the legs were pink. In flight, all of the primaries and the trailing edge of the secondaries were dark and the rest of the wing was lighter brown and speckled with dark spots. There was no light window on the wing like all of the nearby Herring Gulls showed. The mantle on the flying bird was heavily speckled with dark spots like we saw on the swimming bird. The underwing was very dark near the primaries and lighter on the innerwing.

Similar species and how eliminated: Second winter Herring Gull eliminated by size, bill size, lack of a gray mantle, lack of streaking on the head and underparts, lack of a window on the upperwing, by the all white tail with a dark band at the tip, and by the very dark underside of the primaries. Second winter Lesser Black-backed Gull eliminated by smaller size, browner uppertail, and heavily streaked head and underparts.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with the sun mostly behind us and the sky cloudy. Estimated viewing distance was 75 yards at the closest. I used Nikon 8 x 23 binoculars and a Bushnell 20-45x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have seen hundreds of Great Black-backed Gulls in Massachusetts and along the east coast.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America and  
Grant Guide to the Identification of Gulls

How long before field notes were made? immediately after each sighting

How long before this form was completed? written after first sighting  
and updated after second sighting

What species? Greater Black-backed Gull How many? oneLocation? Saylorville ReservoirType of habitat? coxe entrance on east side of reservoir north of visitor center.When? date(s): 30 November 1986 time: ar 4 pm to (didn't have watch) *dr. 15 min's*Who? your name and address: Paul Martsching 1120 Marston Ames, IA 50010others with you: Steve Dinsmore

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Bigger than a Herring Gull (there were many to compare it with) - very noticeably bigger, but not a real lot bigger - maybe 1/5th bigger; bigger headed; bill longer and more massive; light based bill darkening toward tip and being very dark by end 1/3rd; head white with no obvious specking or streaking (I was able to plainly see streaking on the heads and necks of the 2nd year Herring Gulls near it); tail white at very tip, then black band - maybe 1/4th the length of the tail, then rest of tail white; light rump; medium brown back; wings <sup>(from side)</sup> basically light brown with dark brown primaries and bar running out <sup>along the back edge of</sup> wing. Leg color never seen (the bird was never seen standing, and I didn't think to try to see the leg color during the time ~~it~~ I saw it flying); saw a fair while ~~was~~ sitting on the water & preening. Got a good look at the tail (which I first concentrated on when the bird began to fly) and a good but breif look at the top side of the wings before it flew off.

A couple times while Steve was using the spotting scope on the bird, I looked at the gulls in the National Geographic field guide. From the size alone there is very little to choose from, and the bird certianly wasn't a Glaucous, (which we also saw) which has light primaries in all plumages. I thought of the possibility of a super-huge Herring Gull (does gigantism occur often in birds??), but it didn't look like any of the 1st or 2nd year Herring Gulls present, and there were plenty of them to make comparisons. The only big gull shown <sup>as flying</sup> in Peterson and in Robbins ~~look~~ with a black tail band and with a white extreme tip is the Greater Black-backed. First winter Ring-billed has this pattern, but is much smaller than a Herring, let alone this bird.

Similar species and how eliminated: I don't recall seeing the bottom side of the wings. see above The part of the breast visable when the bird was sitting on the water, was white. (sketch on back)

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? no

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting; distance (how measured), and optical equipment: overcast; distance??; could pick out because of size with 7 x 35 bino's; needed 20 x 80's to see much details; spotting scope even better.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: never seen before

References and persons consulted before writing description: as above; we each came to a definite conclusion as to identification idepently from our own notes *we never saw each others notes or discussed them.*

How long before field notes made? one the spot this form <sup>was</sup> completed? two days *independant study of various field guides*

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

This rough sketch is for pattern and color only (not proportions); the bird was seen quite briefly in this position - spread out perpendicular to view - that is seeing ~~xxx~~ entire top side. The pattern was quite striking.

