

Laughing Gull 1
9 Sep 1990
L. Manawa, Pottawattamie Co., IA
T. Bray, R. Silcock
IBL 61:20, 62:22

Record Number: 90-31
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATIONS

Tanya E. Bray
Ross Silcock

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 61:20
Records Committee: IBL 62:22

VOTE: 7 A-E

A-E: One hundred per cent identification but must be treated as AE because of leg band and loss of bird from nearby zoo.

A-E: Pretty obvious identification and origin.

A-E: Bummer!!

A-E: So much for avian flight-preventing surgery. Thanks to Babs Padelford for her careful observation and subsequent research as to the origin of this bird. Otherwise, excellent descriptions by all observers. Better luck next time.

A-E: Due to last comment by Bray it looks as though this bird came from the Henry Dourly Zoo (position of leg band and disappearance of bird at approx. the same time). The description adequately describes Laughing Gull.

A-D: Good details and documentations. With the probability tht this bird was one from the Henry Doorly Zoo this must be classified as A-E.

Laughing Gull

Plumage: Adult breeding changing to winter
 September 9, 1990; various times
 Lake Manawa, Pottawattamie County

Approximately 7:35 a.m. Gull is perched on buoy about 150 feet away.
 Sun directly behind observer. Light very good.

Equipment: 7x26 binoculars, 25x Spotting Scope

With me: Babs Padelford

Description:

Generally, a medium-sized, slender, attenuated dark-hooded gull.

This bird had a partial hood; the forehead, about one half of the crown, and the cheek area were mostly white. A thin black line went around the back of the neck where the hood would normally end. The back of the neck and the back half of the crown were smudgy dark gray. The eye coverts, while visible, did not stand out (were not strikingly noticeable) because of the white cheek background. Bill was dark red seemingly overlaid with black and had a dark red tip. The mantle was completely darkish smoke gray with a white trailing edge to the wing. Upperside of the primaries were black with no white tips or any white spots at all. When preening the underside of the outer primaries were black or very dark gray from base to tip. The inner primaries were a shade lighter being medium gray from base to tip. Legs were dusky red and long.

In flight, the tail was completely white. Wings long, pointed, and slender.

Behavior: Bird was sitting on buoy when we arrived. Preened for about a minute, and then flew off toward center of lake. (I must admit I did not notice any particular flight characteristics.)

Approximately 8:45 a.m. Bird is relocated swimming with Ring-billed Gulls at great distance. Observer with sun on right hand. Distance and light preclude any detailed observation.

Equipment: 25x Scope

With me: Babs Padelford

Description:

At this distance, the bird was identifiable by size (slightly smaller than Ring-bills). The head looked mostly white with just edges of the former hood visible at back of neck.

12:15 p.m. Laughing Gull still swimming with Ring-billed Gulls. Distance from bird approximately 75-100 feet. Clear skies, sun directly overhead.

With me: Babs Padelford

Equipment: 7 x 26 binoculars

Before us: Ross Silcock

Description:

Length and shape of bill noted. The bill was curved, with a slight hook at the end; a more slender version of the typical gull bill as compared with Ring-billed gulls present. This is somewhat subjective as no Franklin's Gulls were there for comparison. Nevertheless, the bill did appear to be longer than Franklin's Gull should be, hooked and thicker at the tip.

Behavior:

The bird swam with Ring-billed Gulls in a shallow, quiet cove well out of the way of the many speedboats and water skiers present this day. For most of the day, the birds stayed in this area, flying occasionally when disturbed by a boat passing too close.

6:30 p.m. Laughing Gull still swimming with Ring-billed Gulls. Distance from bird approximately 100 feet. Sky completely cloudy.

Equipment: 7 x 26 binoculars, 25 x Scope

With me: Babs and Loren Padelford

At this time, a thin black line was seen on the front of the neck where the hood would normally end. There was also some remnant of the hood-- smudgy black extending from the back of the neck into the rear cheek area but not reaching the eye. The wings were much longer than the tail, crossing beyond the tail, and extending at least two inches beyond the tail. The Laughing Gull appeared to be only slightly smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls in direct comparison **in length** but was of a much lighter build, less bulky. The head and neck were more slender than Ring-billed. Tail was snowy white.

Voice: Not heard at any time

Similar Species eliminated:

This bird differed from Franklin's Gull in the following ways:

1. Less extensive black on head. Eye coverts were not immediately noticeable due to white cheek area.
2. Longer legs, more upright posture, and generally a very long, slender bird.
3. In flight, the bird had long slender wings with completely dark primaries; no white dividing the tips of the outer primaries from the rest of wing, and no white tips to outer primaries. Underside of primaries as described above.
4. Bill was long, curved and slightly swollen and hooked at tip.

Books consulted: At time of 7:15 a.m. sighting: Nat. Geographic F. Guide
After gull had flown, Advanced Birding.

All persons cited above agreed this was an adult Laughing Gull.

Notes written approximately 30 seconds after sighting. This report
written about an hour after last sighting.

Janya E. Bray

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Addendum to Documentation of Laughing Gull
November 13, 1990

After learning that Ross Silcock had sent in his documentation of this gull, I submit this additional information.

On the following day, September 10, 1990, Babs Padelford returned to Lake Manawa and relocated the gull. At that time she was able to see a band on (I believe) the right leg above the knee. She contacted Dan Cassidy, curator of birds at the Henry Doorly Zoo who gave her the following information.

Two Laughing Gulls had been surgically altered to prevent flight, and then released on a pond on the zoo grounds. Other than this procedure, no enclosure or other means of preventing flight was provided. A few days later one of their birds disappeared. Dan also confirmed that zoo personnel band their gulls above the knee.

It seems reasonable to assume that the gull seen at Lake Manawa came from the Henry Doorly Zoo, a distance of only a few miles.

DOCUMENTATION OF UNUSUAL BIRD IN IOWA

90-31

Species: LAUGHING GULL 1 adult
Date: Sept 9, 1990
Location: Lake Manawa, Pottawattamie County

Description: I received a phone call from Loren Padelford that Babs Padelford and Tanya Bray had found what they believed was a Laughing Gull at Lake Manawa. I arrived there about 11.15am. Babs and Tanya showed me where the bird was and I went there alone with my Sr Balscope and 10 X 50 binoculars. The bird was resting on the water with 20 or so first-winter-plumaged Ring-billed Gulls. These birds were just off a wooded point at the north end of Lake Manawa and so I had to wade some distance to get close to them. I was able to scope the possible Laughing Gull from about 100 yards in excellent light. As the bird was sitting on the water I was able to discern the following:

(a copy of my field notes is attached, albeit indecipherable)

Key features in identification were the head, which was essentially white or almost white, except for a gray nape and rear crown, and a dark line from the nape around the neck to the front, almost encircling the neck (see sketch in field notes). There was no obvious eye ring and the sides of the head ("face") were white. Forehead was white. Bill was dark. Also noticeable was the length of the folded primaries. These extended past the end of the tail probably 50% of the tail length. From behind the bird I could see the underside of the all-white tail and above it the black primaries crossing at the end of the tail (see sketch). There was no white visible in the primaries. There was a small white area at the base of the folded primaries which would have been the folded secondaries. Mantle and back were dark gray and remainder of bird was white. Legs were not visible. From the side the length of the primaries and the absence of white thereon was very obvious.

I was unable to flush the bird and did not get any help from passing boats.

The main contender for confusion in identification would be Franklin's Gull. However any plumage of Franklin's Gull which has an all-white tail would show a virtually complete, even though possibly faded, black hood, absent from this bird, which showed traces only of the hood which was being molted during the change from summer plumage. The length of the primaries relative to the tail and the absence of white in this adult plumage also supports Laughing Gull rather than Franklin's.

in primaries

The bird was under observation for about 25 minutes.

Ross Silcock
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Sept 10, 1990



