

Mew Gull  
20 Dec 1994  
Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA  
\*S. Dinsmore  
IBL 64:48, 68, Dinsmore 1995

Record Number: 93-37  
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Stephen J. Dinsmore [7/26/94]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 64:48

Records Committee: IBL 64:68

Dinsmore, S. J. 1995. Mew Gull at Saylorville Reservoir. Iowa Bird Life 65:103-104.

VOTE: 6 A-D, 1 no vote

A-D, Dinsmore bird was an entirely different bird and should not have been included with 93-30.

A-D, All yellow, smaller, more pointed bill, darker mantle, and size seem sufficient to eliminate

Ring-billed Gull.

A-D, Basic plumage adult Mew Gull.

A-D, 3rd winter adult Mew Gull.

## LAUGHING GULL AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

THOMAS H. KENT

Gordon Brown reported to the Birdline an adult Laughing Gull that he saw below the Saylorville Reservoir dam on 10 May 1995. I arrived there the next morning at 8:10 a.m. The black-hooded gull was easily picked out from the first-summer Ring-billed and Herring gulls and alternate-plumaged Caspian Terns present. It was 10 to 15 percent smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls, but its legs were nearly as long. The all-black hood extended to the back of the nape. There were white crescents above and below the eyes. The lower one was just a thin white line. The upper one was slightly wider and more on the posterior side than the anterior side of the dark eye. The bill was about two-thirds as long as that of the average Ring-billed Gull. It was dark gray-maroon and drooped smoothly at the upper tip. The legs were dark dusky-pink. The mantle was dark gray. I flushed the bird twice to see it in flight and to take photographs. The wing tips from the bend of the wing to the tip were black from above and below. On the upper surface, there was a thin white trailing edge on the secondaries and inner primaries. The proximal wing was dark gray above and nearly white below. There was no white between the distal black and proximal gray. The tail was all white -- no gray in the center. While on the bar, the bird was preening and standing. I was surprised when the bird let out a typical Laughing Gull laugh. Pam Allen also documented similar field marks and heard the bird call.

Laughing Gull has been found in Iowa each year since the first accepted record in 1989. Most have been juvenile or first-summer/second-winter birds found in summer or fall, although one adult was at Saylorville Reservoir on 13 Apr 1990 (IBL 61:20, 62:21). First- and even second-summer Franklin's Gulls may lack the white bar separating the outer black wing tip from the inner gray upper wing. Perhaps a better mark for separating these two species is the amount of black on the wing tip on the underside of the wing. Franklin's has a small amount giving a "dipped in ink" look, while Laughing has most of the outer part of the underwing black (Fig. 1).

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

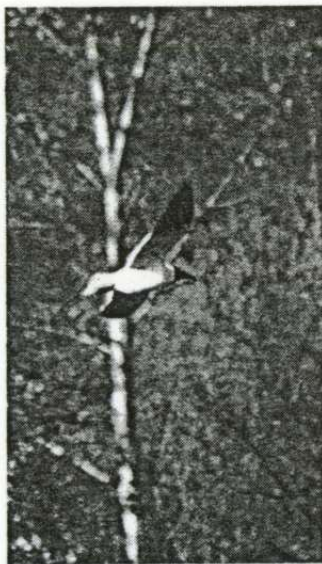
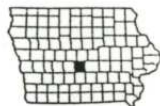


Figure 1. Adult Laughing Gull at Saylorville Reservoir. Note amount of dark on under part of outer wing.



## MEW GULL AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

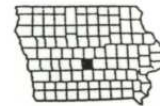
STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

At 3:42 p.m. on 20 December 1993, I observed an adult Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) on the jetty of the Lakeview Recreation Area at Saylorville Reservoir in Polk County. The bird was in the company of about 100 gulls, mostly Ring-billed and Herring gulls, that were resting and feeding around the jetty. The bird remained on the jetty until 4:53 p.m., when it flew northeast over the lake to roost with other gulls on the open water.

The following description of the bird was written with the bird under direct observation. The most striking features were the small, slender bill, dove-like head shape, and darker mantle and upperwings. The bird was slightly smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls surrounding it, but not nearly as bulky. Its longer-winged appearance gave it a much slimmer look. The bill was very close to half the length of that of a Ring-billed Gull, and slightly slimmer. The bill was entirely yellow, lacking a ring or other markings, and appeared more pointed than the bill of a Ring-billed Gull. The head shape was also distinct, resembling that of a dove. This was further accentuated by the eye which seemed proportionately large when compared to the eye of a Ring-billed Gull. The eye appeared dark. The head was white with prominent brown markings, most noticeably across the nape. There was also a dark area surrounding the eye. The tail and underparts were also white. The upperwings and mantle were dark gray, a shade darker than those of a Ring-billed or Herring Gull. The outer two primaries (numbers 9-10) were mostly black, with large mirrors evident near the tips. In flight, the minimal amount of black on the remaining primaries (roughly numbers 5-8), the large amount of white color separating the gray upperwing from the black color in those primaries, and the broad white trailing edge to the wing were visible. The underwing was mostly white, except that the black primaries were visible on the underside of the wing. The legs were dull yellow-green and appeared duller than the legs of a Ring-billed Gull. The wing pattern, white tail, and yellow bill were all characters of an adult in basic (third-basic) plumage.

There are two subspecies of Mew Gulls that occur regularly in the Lower 48 states. The North American subspecies *L. c. brachyrhynchus* breeds in northwestern Canada and Alaska and is a widespread winter resident along the West Coast. In cases where subspecies has been mentioned, most, if not all, records of vagrant Mew Gulls in the interior U.S. appear to belong to this subspecies. The European subspecies *L. c. canus* occurs as a vagrant along the Atlantic Coast south to North Carolina. Adults are most easily separated by the amount of white in the primaries, with *canus* having the white color restricted to large white mirrors on the outer two primaries. *Brachyrhynchus* has much more white in the primaries, especially the divide between gray and black on the middle primaries [see Grant (1986), Tove (1993)]. The bird in question appeared to have too much white in the wingtip for *canus*. Furthermore, *canus* often shows a clear, dusky subterminal ring on the bill in basic plumage (Tove 1993), a feature this bird lacked.

This represents the third record of a Mew Gull in Iowa. The first record was of a second-basic *brachyrhynchus* from 16-31 December 1982 at Davenport (Kent 1983). The second record was of a first-basic bird, thought to be *canus*, on 19 December 1993 at Red Rock Reservoir (Johnson 1995). This species may be overlooked as a



regular late fall migrant in Iowa. Records in the upper Midwest are on the increase, and at least a couple are found each year around the Great Lakes.

#### LITERATURE CITED

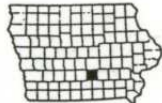
- Grant, P. J. 1986. Gulls: A guide to identification. Buteo Books, Vermillion, South Dakota. 352 pp.  
Johnson, A. 1995. Mew Gull at Red Rock Reservoir. *Iowa Bird Life* 65: 53-55.  
Kent, T. H. 1983. Mew Gull at Lock and Dam 14. *Iowa Bird Life* 53: 45-46.  
Tove, M. H. 1993. Field separation of Ring-billed, Mew, Common, and Kamchatka gulls. *Birding* 25: 386-401.

4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50014

### ANOTHER MEW GULL AT RED ROCK RESERVOIR

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE AND JIM SINCLAIR

At 7 a.m. on 11 December 1994, Dinsmore arrived below the dam of Red Rock Reservoir in Marion County. At 7:20 a.m., he noticed a smaller gull that was similar to the first-basic Ring-billed Gulls. The bird was roughly the size of a Ring-billed Gull with an overall dark coloration. The bird had a dainty appearance, an entirely dark uppertail, and looked small-billed and large-eyed. He concluded the bird was a first-basic Mew Gull of the nominate North American race *brachyrhynchus*. Jim Sinclair arrived shortly and we studied the bird until 8:30 a.m.



The following is a description of the bird. It was slightly smaller than a Ring-billed Gull, and appeared slimmer-winged in flight. The mantle was dark gray with some brown mottling. The wing coverts were dark brown and the primaries were black. Mantle color was a shade darker than that of an adult Ring-billed Gull. The collar and crown were washed with brown. The forehead and throat were white. The remainder of underparts were washed with pale brown (darkest across belly). The vent was pale and mottled with dark brown. The legs were dull pink. The head was dainty and dove-like, perhaps accentuated by the round forehead and small bill. The eye was dark and appeared large compared to that of a Ring-billed Gull. The bill was very short, thin, and bicolored: distal half dark, becoming pale pink near base. The wingtips extended well beyond the tail tip when perched. Upperwing pattern was as follows: outer primaries and their coverts blackish, inner primary coverts dark with a paler "window" on inner primaries, tips of inner primaries dark, secondary coverts pale brown and lighter than primary coverts, tips of secondaries dark brown, forming a dark bar along trailing edge of wing. The rump was pale brown with darker barring. The upper surfaces of the rectrices were entirely dark brown. The flight of this bird was much more buoyant than that of a Ring-billed Gull. Based on these features, we aged the bird as first-basic. The tail and wing patterns, generally darker coloration, large eye, and smaller bill all eliminate first-basic Ring-billed Gull. Identification to subspecies was based on tail pattern and more extensive dark color on head and underparts.

The bird was reportedly present through 1 January 1995, although we looked for but did not observe the bird after 17 December 1994. This represents the fourth

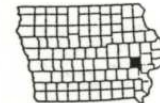
record of a Mew Gull in Iowa. All of the birds have occurred in December, suggesting this species may be overlooked as a late fall migrant in the state. First-basic birds should occur as often as adults, but may be overlooked because of their similarity to first-basic Ring-billed Gulls.

4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames, IA 50014, and 810 North B St., Indianola, IA 50125

### PRAIRIE WARBLERS NESTING IN JOHNSON COUNTY

CHRIS EDWARDS

On the morning of 8 July 1995 at Lake Macbride State Park in Johnson County I saw a pair of adult Prairie Warblers feeding four recently-fledged young. The habitat was a large brushy hillside with many shrubs and small deciduous trees. I had previously seen an adult male Prairie Warbler at this location on 17 May 1995 and 5 June 1995. The male and at least one juvenile were still present on 15 July 1995 but were not found on subsequent visits.



The male was easily recognized by its bright yellow face and underparts, black eye stripe, mustachial stripe, and streaked sides, and chestnut streaks on an olive-green back. The female was slightly duller colored with gray facial stripes and streaks on its sides, and fainter chestnut streaking on the back. The juveniles had a light gray head and throat, and an olive-green back. The breast and upper belly were light yellow fading to white on the lower belly, with a few faint gray streaks on the sides. The upper side of the wings and tail were gray, and the underside of the tail was white with narrow black edging. The juveniles appeared to be the same size as the adults.

I observed the adults and young interacting for 90 minutes. While the fledglings awkwardly hopped among the branches of small shrubs and occasionally flew short distances, the adults made frequent feeding trips and rested only briefly. The male foraged primarily in trees and shrubs while the female most often foraged near the ground. They occasionally hovered and gleaned insects from the tips of branches. Several types of insects, including green caterpillars, were fed to the young. The juveniles gave continual sharp call notes which became louder and more frequent as the adults approached with food.

The male sang a typical ascending buzzy "zee-zee-zee" song infrequently, and on two occasions was heard singing other songs. On 17 May it repeatedly sang "witchety-witchety-witchety" similar to a Common Yellowthroat. On 15 July it repeatedly sang a high, thin song similar to an American Redstart. Both Common Yellowthroats and American Redstarts were present at the location. On one occasion the male was seen chasing a Blue-winged Warbler.

This is the first confirmed nesting of Prairie Warbler in Iowa, but there is a record of a nest with eggs found in Lee County on 5 June 1886 (P. A. DuMont, *Wilson Bulletin* 47:205-208, 1935) which was judged as probable by the Records Committee. The Prairie Warbler is a rare summer resident in the state. There are a few unconfirmed reports prior to 1977, but it has been reported in all except two years since then, mostly from Lee, Johnson, and Allamakee counties. Iowa is at the western edge of the Prairie Warbler's summer range. Thanks to Tom Kent for his help with this note.

85 Whitman Avenue, North Liberty, IA 52317

93-37

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Mew Gull (Larus canus brachyrhynchus)  
 Number: 1 adult in basic (third-winter) plumage  
 Location: Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co., IA-on jetty at Lakeview Rec. Area  
 Habitat: perched on jetty with other gulls  
 Date: 20 December 1993  
 Time: 3:42-4:53 p.m.  
 Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 2600 Glen Burnie Raleigh, N.C. 27607  
 Others who saw bird: Susan Grove, Eugene and Eloise Armstrong

Description of bird(s): I was scanning over about a hundred gulls that were gathering on the jetty when I noticed a smaller, darker-mantled gull with a dainty head which I immediately recognized as a Mew Gull. The bird remained on the jetty until dusk when it flew out over the reservoir to roost with other gulls on the water.

The bird was quite distinctive and I had no trouble relocating it several times after the gulls unexpectedly took flight. The most striking features of this bird were the small, slender bill, dove-like head shape, and darker mantle and upperwings. The following notes were written while the bird was under direct observation.

Size slightly smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls surrounding it. The bird was not nearly as bulky as a Ring-billed Gull, and when combined with its longer-winged appearance gave it a much slimmer look. The bill was very close to half the length of a Ring-billed Gull's, and slightly slimmer. Bill was entirely yellow, lacking a ring or other bill markings, and appeared more pointed than the bill of a Ring-billed Gull. Head shape also distinct, resembling that of a dove. This was further accentuated by the eye which seemed disproportionately large when compared to the eye of a Ring-billed Gull. Eye color appeared dark, but that may have been due to the distance. The head was white with prominent brown markings, most noticeably across the nape. There was also a dark area surrounding the eye. The tail and underparts were also white. The upperwings and mantle were dark gray, a shade darker than those of a Ring-billed or Herring Gull. The outer two primaries (numbers 9-10) were mostly black, with large mirrors evident near the tips (also seen while the bird was perched). In flight, the minimal amount of black on the remaining primaries (roughly numbers 5-8), the large amount of white color separating the gray upperwing from the black color in primaries 5-8, and the broad white trailing edge to the wing were visible. The underwing was mostly white, except that the black primaries were visible on the underside of the wing. The legs were dull yellow-green and appeared duller than the legs of a Ring-billed Gull. The wing pattern, white tail, and yellow bill were all characters of an adult in basic (third-winter) plumage.

There are two subspecies of Mew Gulls that occur in North America. The North American subspecies L. c. brachyrhynchus breeds in NW Canada and Alaska and is a widespread winter resident along the West Coast. To my knowledge, all records of vagrant Mew Gulls in the interior U.S. belong to this subspecies. The European subspecies L. c. canus occurs as a vagrant along the Atlantic Coast. Adults are most easily separated by the amount of white in the primaries, with canus having the white color restricted to large white mirrors on the outer two primaries. Brachyrhynchus has much more white in the primaries, especially the divide between gray and black on the middle primaries [see Grant (1986), Tove (1993)]. The bird in question clearly had too much white in the wingtip for canus. Furthermore, canus often shows a clear, dusky subterminal ring in basic plumage (Tove 1993), a feature this bird appeared to lack.

Similar species and how eliminated: On the basis of size and general plumage characters, this species could only be confused with Ring-billed Gull, hundreds of which were available for direct comparison. The combination of slightly smaller size, distinct head shape, bill color and shape, dark eye, and slightly darker mantle and upperwings are sufficient to eliminate Ring-billed Gull.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with overcast skies. Estimated viewing distance was 75-100 meters. I used a Kowa 20-60x spotting scope and Leica 10x42 binoculars.

Previous experience with species: I have seen two Mew Gulls of the European subspecies (L. c. canus), one in Massachusetts and the other in North Carolina. This is the first North American Mew Gull i've seen.

References consulted:

NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America

Grant, P.J. 1986. Gulls: A guide to identification.

Tove, M. H. 1993. Field separation of Ring-billed, Mew, Common, and Kamchatka Gulls. *Birding* 25: 386-401.

How long before field notes made: brief notes written with bird under observation

How long before this form completed: written 5 January 1994