

Western Gull
11 Dec 1989
Davenport, Scott Co., IA
P. Petersen, B. Blevins, G. White
also 12/12; IBL 60:49, 52, 61:86

Record Number: 89-55
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATIONS

Peter C. Petersen, 11, 12 Dec
Brain Blevins, 12 Dec
Gerald White, 12 Dec

LETTERS

Pete Petersen to Carl [Bendorf], 3 November 1990
Gerald White to I.O.U. Records Committee, 10 November 1990

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:49, 52
Records Committee: 61:86

VOTE: 3 A-D, 4 NA

A-D: By combining all documents I believe I can accept the record.

NA: Many features described do lend support for Western Gull. To my analysis, however, there is not quite enough detail to eliminate a reasonable doubt. For a bird this unexpected (which is also not that easy to identify), the descriptions are very brief and lacking detail. There is no one diagnostic feature for this species, so a combination of features must be convincingly described. The only size difference described vs. Herring was "heavy (jizz)" and "seemed to have a chunkier body". There is a very big leap from these short impressions to something like what Grant says in his 2nd edition (p. 178-9): "Western Gull is about the size of (Herring) or slightly smaller, but it is very stockily built, with heavily domed forehead, very stout and 'blob-ended' bill (depth of bill obviously greater near the tip than at the base), and proportionately shorter- and broader-winged. The compound effect of these structural differences is to give a generally much larger impression, and -especially in the [adult] plumage-recalls Great Black-backed Gull when an observer sees a Western Gull for the first time." I have just had the chance to study both Western and Yellow-footed Gulls at the Salton Sea on Sept. 12 and found the bill size and shape to be very noticeable and hard to miss. To me, these structural differences are a real key on Western Gull but this just doesn't seem to come through in the three documentations. Most of the attention seemed to be on the mantel color. One bird that could fit the darker mantel and also perfectly fit nearly every other described feature would be a Herring Gull of the vega subspecies. Admittedly, a record for this subspecies would be very unexpected, but perhaps no more so than Western Gull. As of 1986, DeSante and Pyle in their Distributional Checklist of North American Birds listed records from only the following: British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho, Arizona and Illinois. Clearly this bird is almost never away from west coast except for the inexplicable Illinois record, identified from a specimen taken Oct-Nov 1927. Possibly most troubling about

this record are the two documentations of an adult Great Black-backed Gull from the same area the very next day. The possibility that this was the same bird as the 'Western' is enough that a more complete and detailed description is needed.

A-D: As unlikely as this record seems, its credibility is supported by key points of ID, including wingtip pattern, uniform width of trailing edge, leg color, etc. A return of the Slaty-backed Gull seemed as likely as the appearance of a Western, but again, wingtips and description of trailing edge eliminate that. All other species eliminated by the documentations. Pete, please type or write more legibly. The value of your documentations are severely diminished by their unreadability.

A-D: The three documentations seem to basically agree with each other making a strong case for a winter plumaged adult Western Gull. The strongest points as I see it are 1) heavy deep yellow bill with large red gonyl spot 2) mirror in tenth primary only 3) bulkier bird with heavier jizz than Herring Gulls present 4) viewed several different times at moderately close distances. Also, I saw nothing in the three documentations that did not support Western.

NA: This is an interesting record. There seems to be inconsistency in what shade of gray the bird had. One observer said back was color of Slaty-backed Gull; one said it was lighter than Slaty-backed Gull. One key field mark mentioned by all documentations was the pink legs. A very few Lesser Black-backed Gulls do have pink legs. This was not discussed by any of the observers. Two of the observers did not say much or anything about body shape (jizz) or bill shape/size in comparison to other gulls present. Harrison (SEABIRDS, 1983) also mentions that Herring Gulls regularly hybridize with several species including Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls. The offspring of these combinations would show characteristics of both parents, which would explain the pink legs or single subapical spot on the leading primaries only, (or even size). None of the descriptions eliminated or discussed any of the hybridization possibilities. I could find very little written about hybridization possibilities and methods of separation between the species. Research material is lacking on these possibilities (even though they are a real possibility). With very few Lesser Black-backed Gulls in this country and the need to breed strong it would be a strong possibility that they would interbreed with Herring Gulls (or some other species). This bird could be the outcome of some type of interbreeding, whether between Lesser Black-backed, Great Black-backed, Herring, or some other possible species. I can not say beyond reasonable doubt that the documentations do describe a Western Gull. They are suggestive but I am not sure enough to conclude that fact. I think we need more information on hybridization and I would feel better about this record if an expert on Western Gulls could review these documentations. Tom Kent also mentioned the fact that he saw (in his documentation) an adult Great Black-backed Gull near where this bird was seen the next day but could not find this bird. Those

who documented the Western Gull did not mention the bird Kent saw either. This leaves doubt in my mind also.

NA: I have questions about this gull. More details are needed for a West Coast bird that's rare inland to be accepted. More comparing and contrasting with Herring Gulls would have been very helpful comparing size in flight and wing length. A Great Black-backed Gull would be more likely in Iowa. I think more details to exclude a Great Black-backed Gull were necessary. Harrison in SEABIRDS lists body lengths of Herring Gulls as 22-26 inches, Westerns as 24-27 inches, and Great Black-backed as 28-31 inches. A small Great Black-backed Gull would be similar to large Herring Gulls and in line with the three descriptions submitted for size especially at 100 yards away. Pete Petersen notes the heavy jizz of the bird and Gerald White notes a chunkier body than Herring Gulls nearby possibly denoting a larger bird than a Herring Gull such as a Great Black-backed Gull. The mantle color is possibly subjective and is viewed with some caution by me. I'm not sure if the one white window on the primary tip is definitive and would eliminate Great Black-backed Gull. With these doubts I must vote NA.

NA: It would be easy to discount this ID based on presence of Great Black-backed Gull. I had trouble with exact location of Great Black-backed (where is Tuxedo's Restaurant?), but it appears to be 2-3 miles distant from putative Western. Occurrence could easily be coincidental. All 3 documentations strongly note lighter gray of mantle vs. blacker primaries, and size not dissimilar to Herring Gulls in contrast to observers of Great Black-backed Gull # 89-56. The latter was "25% bigger" than Herrings, according to the Kent. To me, it seems this bird was either a Western or Slaty-backed Gull. Petersen and Blevins note only one primary spot, that on the 10th (Petersen; not located by Blevins). From my own experience trying to pin down the primary spotting pattern on Slaty-backed, I am not sure these documentations adequately distinguish the two species! I am inclined to believe the more likely Slaty-backed. I believe color photographs showing the mantle-primary contrast and the mantle color relative to Herring Gulls would be needed to clinch ID. Because I cannot be sure of ID--none of the 3 documentations have convinced me--I am opting for NA, but believe Slaty-backed is most likely--possibly the same bird seen early 1989 in same area. Also, what about, for example, Herring X Great Black-backed Gull. RECONSIDERATION (at meeting of 11 Nov 1990 with Petersen letter): A motion was approved for the secretary to send the record to outside experts for review.

89-55

Inland Bird Banding Association

Nov 3, 1990



Dear Carl;

Here are my rather meager obs. for Aug-Oct. I leave Tuesday for New Guinea & New Zealand back Dec. 10.

Can't help but comment on two of the very belated responses to records of last fall's early winter as follows:

Royal Tern: You might wish to consult *Handbook of N. Palearctic* Vol. 4 p. 17-1-27, 28

I grant the photo showed the birds standing in the water & leg length would depend on the water depth as judged by looking at the photo. Two points - the next bird over from the Royal not in the frame showed longer legs and on first view when the boat was in motion too much for photos the birds were on land & it was very clear the legs were shorter. My companions are biologists but not birders & they easily picked out the Royal every time we saw it. Also the underwing pattern was very distinctive - lighter with only dark in the carpal bar area. Note also - the 1987+88 were photographs

88 record was July
↓
88 21. birds were photographs

Western Gull:

No one suggest this bird could be Great Black-backed is insur. They are huge & the primary pattern (tips) quite different. A reason for a difference in description of darkness of back may be that one obs. was AM & the other PM with quite different light conditions. Many thousands of gulls were present at the I. C. area this day with a heavy southward movement.

I hope these two records can be re-examined by the somewhat more objective expert committee

Sincerely

Bob Peterson

GERALD D WHITE
1505 E 5TH ST
MUSCATINE IOWA 52761
319 263-3464

89-55

11/10/80

I.O.U. Records Committee'

Request for a review of the documentation of Western Gull #89-55.

In the past my reports have been criticized because they had descriptive comments that the reviewers felt were influenced by the literature I had referenced. Since that time I have tried to report only about comments that I have dictated into my recorder at the time of the sighting. I also only make size comparisons to other birds which are in sight at the same time as the object bird.

Since I don't have the observation or writing skills of Grant, my documentations are going to be conservative in nature. I believe if this documentation is read carefully you will find bird size by comparison to Herring Gull, bill size and mantle color by comparison to Herring Gull, And color of the primaries.

The only change I wish to make is the choice of words when describing the "jizz". Instead of "chunker" I should have mentioned that the bird in profile and the brief look of the wings when the bird landed gave the impression of a large bird.

The common factor in all four of the negative reviewers notes was the possibility of the bird being the Great Black-backed Gull of #89-56. However, I don't believe that any outside expert would hold any reservations when separating my documentation from a Greater Black-backed Gull.

Sincerely,

Gerald White

1. Species: Western Gull Number seen: 1
 (If known) Age: adult Sex: _____ Plumage: winter

2. Location (including county): On Miss. River channel ice between Davenport, Scott Co. IA

3. Date(s): Dec. 11 & 12, 1989 Time of day: 3:30 to 3:35 PM 12/11
8:20 to 8:25 AM 12/12
9:00 to 9:15 AM 12/12

4. Observers -- Your name: Peter C. Petersen Phone: (319) 355 7054

Address: 235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport, IA Zip 52805

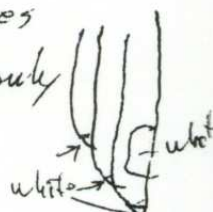
Others present: none

Others before or after you: Lewis & Brian Blarins, Jerry White

5. Describe the habitat the bird(s) was found in and the surrounding habitat:
On ice covered channel of Mississippi - 1/4 - 1/2 mi upstream (East) of Lock & Dam 15.

6. Description: Describe in great detail (but only include what actually was seen in the field (the size, shape and color pattern of the bird(s)). Include a description of the bill, eye, legs, feet, tail, body and wings as well as other diagnostic characteristics.

Herring-sized Gull, mantle dark gray ~~transitioning~~ into black tip with no white edge between, longer primaries with small white tips & white sub-terminal area on 10th only. Head, neck & body white, some tan streaks on head & head neck. Eyes ^{seemed} light, legs pink. Narrow white trailing edge on wing from above. Tail white. Bird showed heavy (jizz) vs. Herring - Bill yellow with red gony spot near tip, a bit heavier than Herring. Bird in company of 1200± Herring, 200± Ring-bills, 1 imm C. (caerulescens) Gull.



Species: Western Gull Date seen: Dec 11/12, 1984 Observer: P. C. Petersen 89-55

7. Similar species (explain how eliminated):

Slaty-backed Gull - Gray mantle merged directly to black tip, trailing white wing edge too narrow.
Lesser Black-bird Gull - leg color pink, bird too large.
Greater Black-bird Gull - Bird too small, back not black enough, legs too dark for S-b.

8. Describe the bird's behavior: standing on ice & flying with other gulls.

9. Describe the song or call notes heard: not distinguished from other nearby gulls.

10. Viewing conditions:

Optical equipment used (type, power): 10X40 Zeiss binocs, Swift scope at 30-40X60.

Closest distance to bird (how measured): 100m. est.

Lighting and weather: P.M. obs. - sun 90° to side - obs. in F.A. A.M. obs. - sun directly behind

Was the bird photographed? no By whom? obs. obs. in F.A. Attached?

11. Summarize previous experience with this species and similar species:

Have seen on many occasions in the West

12. Other observers who did not agree with the identification (explain): none

13. List books and illustrations consulted and advice received. How did these influence this description?

Checked Geo, Harrison-seabirds & Grant-Gulls overnight between observations to determine fine points of id. This did not influence the description but made me aware of what to look for

14. How long after observing the bird(s) before field notes completed? 10 min.

15. How long after observing the bird(s) before this form completed? 1 hour from notes.

Mail this completed form to:

Avian Ecology Program, Natural Heritage Division
Dept. of Conservation, Springfield, IL 62701

If you have observed a common bird species during a season of abundance, verification is achieved simply by returning there again in season. If, however, the observation involves a rare species, or a common species out of season or at an unusual location, and you wish to share this experience with the scientific community, special documentation is necessary.

An acceptable documentation consists of one or more of the following: a collected, diagnostic specimen; a diagnostic photograph; a diagnostic recording of the bird's voice; or, an accurate and detailed written description of the observation. It must be emphasized that a request for documentation is not an affront, but an effort to perpetuate a record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for all to examine. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation irrespective of the observer.

89-55

1. Species: Western Gull Number seen: 1
 (If known) Age: Adult Sex: Unknown Plumage: Winter Adult
2. Location (including county): Downtown Davenport, Iowa.
3. Date(s): Dec. 12, 1989 Time of day: 3:42 to 4:11 PM
4. Observers -- Your name: Brian Blevins Phone: (319) 324-7326
 Address: 2003 East 12th Street; Dav., Ia Zip 52803
 Others present: Lewis Blevins, Gerry White
 Others before or after you: Pete Petersen
5. Describe the habitat the bird(s) was found in and the surrounding habitat:
Mississippi River - Just above lock + Dam 15 sitting on solid ice.
The bird would get up and work the spillway with Herrings and Glaucous
gulls and generally returned to the ice in approximately 15 to 20 minutes
6. Description: Describe in great detail (but only include what actually was seen in the field (the size, shape and color pattern of the bird(s)). Include a description of the bill, eye, legs, feet, tail, body and wings as well as other diagnostic characteristics.
The bird was recognizably the same size as the Herrings in the group it was with.
It displayed a very bright yellow bill with a red spot. The dark mantle was not
as dark as the Black-backs but a lighter grey more like the slatey-backed, and
there was only one recognizable white spot on the primaries. The feet were
pink in color. There was quite a bit of flecking located on the back of the
head and neck. The eye color was slightly darker yellow than Herring, with dark
Border making eye appear dark from a distance.

Species: Western Gull Date seen: Dec. 13, 1989 Observer: Brian Blevins 89-55

7. Similar species (explain how eliminated): (Lesser Black-backed) eliminated - had pink legs; (Greater Black-backed) eliminated - size, darkness of mantle
(Slaty-backed) eliminated - Primary spotting and white fringing.
8. Describe the bird's behavior: Behavior was simply acted as the Herring's
It seemed to fit in with the Herring's unlike the black-backs or the Slaty-backs
which always seem to be somewhat of outcasts, because their always being
chased or dived at.
9. Describe the song or call notes heard:
10. Viewing conditions:
Optical equipment used (type, power): Redfield 15-45x zoom scope & (7x35 Binocs)
Closest distance to bird (how measured): 75 to 80 yds.
Lighting and weather: Bright (not a cloud in the sky) Day; Very cold 15° below zero
Was the bird photographed? No By whom? _____ Attached? _____
11. Summarize previous experience with this species and similar species:
This is the first time with this species, however I have plenty of experience with
greater and lesser black-backed gulls. We have seen good numbers of these
two species here on the Mississippi in the past 5 years.
12. Other observers who did not agree with the identification (explain): No
13. List books and illustrations consulted and advice received. How did these influence this description? National Geographic Guide, and Audubon's Master Guide.
The bird was first found and observed, then the check points of fine detail
were gone through and eliminated till we derived the correct species, or
substantiated that it was not one of the other more likely species.
14. How long after observing the bird(s) before field notes completed? 15 minutes
15. How long after observing the bird(s) before this form completed? 1 1/4 hours

Mail this completed form to: Avian Ecology Program, Natural Heritage Division
Dept. of Conservation, Springfield, IL 62701

If you have observed a common bird species during a season of abundance, verification is achieved simply by returning there again in season. If, however, the observation involves a rare species, or a common species out of season or at an unusual location, and you wish to share this experience with the scientific community, special documentation is necessary.

An acceptable documentation consists of one or more of the following: a collected, diagnostic specimen; a diagnostic photograph; a diagnostic recording of the bird's voice; or, an accurate and detailed written description of the observation. It must be emphasized that a request for documentation is not an affront, but an effort to perpetuate a record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for all to examine. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation irrespective of the observer.

Documentation of Western Gull (northern species- *Larus occidentalis*) one bird, seen at Davenport IA - 1/4 mi. upstream of Lock&Dam I5 on river ice and in the company of 1,000 or more Herring, Ring bill and one Glaucous Gull. The birds were near an area of open water on the Iowa side of river center, the navigation channel is on the Illinois shore line. The sighting was on 12/12/89 for about three min. at 3:00 PM and again for about thirty min. at 3:50 PM by Gerald White, 1505 E. 5th. St. , Muscatine, IA 52761 P. Petersen of Davenport, IA had seen the bird on 12/11/89 in the PM and again on 12/12/89 AM.

My observations were as follows: Large yellow bill with a red spot at the gonys; white head with gray or brown streaking on top and down nape; eye color- one note entry on tape was light color, but two other entries were dark color; white chest; dark gray mantle; light pink legs (I didn't see the feet); I briefly saw the bird from the back during a landing and noted a uniform white trailing edge on the wing; white tail. The bird then sat at rest on the ice and I observed two white areas on the back; on the folded wing black wing tips with two very small white spots showing (I assumed these to be tips of the primaries); the tone of the gray on the mantle was markedly darker than Herring Gulls next to it, but still a gray tone. I can't say the gull was any larger or smaller than any of several Herring Gulls that were nearby and in the same resting posture. Although when I first saw the bird it was standing in a profile position, while it looked to be about the same length, the bird seemed to have a chunkier body than the Herring Gulls nearby.

I list similar birds and points to eliminate them from consideration I also note my experience with these birds:

Glaucous-winged is paler gray, wing tips are not black; seen many in Alaska. WesternX Glaucous-winged is paler with larger eye; no experience. Herring is paler gray and smaller bill; seen many. Yellow-footed has yellow legs; no experience. Great Blacked-backed is larger and black in color; seen many. Lesser Black-backed has

yellow legs; seen two. Slaty-backed has darker mantle, bright pink legs, and wider white band on wing; seen one. California is smaller and yellow legs; no experience.

B. Blevins of Davenport, IA was at the sight and he only made comment about the tone of the mantle (gray, not black like a Black-backed).

On the first sighting I had strong bright light from my rear. The light was still good but fading on the second sighting. I estimate the bird to have been at 100 or 120 yds. and I was using Leitz 10x40 binoculars and a Bushnell Spacemaster at about 30X

The Western Gull is a life bird. I used as reference, Audubon master Guide; Nat. Geo. Birds of N. A ., second edition; Seabirds by P. Harrison.

Field notes were dictated into recorder while viewing bird and this form was completed 12/14/89.

Gerald White

