

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Printed: 10/18/94

Great Black-backed Gull

7 Mar 1992

Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA

*Sinclair

IBL 62:78, 63:69, Sinclair 1993

Record Number: 92-23

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Jim Sinclair, 810 North B St., Indianola, IA 50125 (6/30/93)

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 62:78

Records Committee: IBL 63:69

Sinclair, J. 1993. A Great Black-backed Gull in Polk County in spring. IBL 63:103-104.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Although more description would have been helpful, the size (larger than Herring Gulls also present) and contrasty black and white pattern of mantle is diagnostic for this species.

A-D, Large size, as described with other markings excludes any other species. Heavy dark bill and strongly contrasting pattern (checker board?) on mantle good mark for this species.

A-D, Details seem sufficient for a 1st-winter Great Black-backed Gull.

away, but we obtained good looks of these two birds together, as well as with Common Loons.

The Red-throated Loon was smaller than the nearby Common Loons, estimated 75 percent of their size. The neck was also noticeably thinner. The throat and front of the neck were white, and there was a definite difference between that white and the gray of the back of the neck and top of the head. The demarcation was pretty much straight up-and-down, as compared to the patterned (white indented) side of the neck of the Common Loon. In addition, the dark portion of the head and neck of the Common Loon was a darker gray than the Red-throated. The bill of the Red-throated was noticeably thinner than that of the Common Loon, and it appeared to be tilted up. When the Red-throated was closest, some white speckling could be seen on the back.

The Pacific Loon appeared to be about the same size as the Red-throated, lacked a patterned neck, but had a very definite demarcation (even more so than the Red-throated) between the white of the foreneck and the dark of the hindneck. The color of the top of the head and face, back of the neck, and back/wings was a gray-brown, compared to the almost black of the Common Loon. The white of the chin, foreneck, and breast was much less extensive than on the Common Loons. The dark area of the face included the eye, and dropped straight down the neck to the bend of the wing. The Pacific Loon also had a smaller bill than the Common Loons, but it was straight, compared to the upturned bill of the Red-throated.

The next day, 9 November, Tom Kent relocated all the loons at the same site and observed a faint chin strap on the Pacific Loon when that bird was as close as 100 yards. To be able to see and compare three species of loons together, two of which are casual in Iowa, is most unusual.

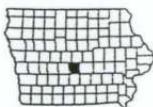
6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, IA 52240

A GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL IN POLK COUNTY IN SPRING

JIM SINCLAIR

At 11:30 a.m. on 7 March 1992, from the parking lot of Sandpiper Beach at Saylorville Lake in Polk County I noticed a flock of approximately 60 gulls loafing on a sand spit just beyond the beach. Amongst the Ring-billed and Herring gulls was one gull which stood out because of its large size. I approached from the northeast to within 200 yards at which point the gull in question took wing. The bird proceeded up the lake shore passing me at approximately 100 yards at eye level. This allowed me a good look under excellent viewing conditions with 10 x 42 binoculars.

The gull was very large, dwarfing even the Herring Gulls with which it had been standing. The bill, which was all black and massive, was a prominent enough feature as to draw immediate attention. The head and neck were pale and without noticeable pattern. On the other hand, the back and upper wing were a strongly contrasting black and white pattern. As the bird proceeded upstream, dark secondary stripes were visible along with a pale rump and a dark tail band. The above features indicated to me that the bird was a first-year Great Black-backed Gull.



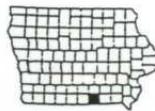
The North American population of the Great Black-backed Gull has been increasing for close to a century and as of yet there is no sign that the expansion of this species has stopped. The species was first reported in Iowa in 1978. In all, there are about 15 reports from Iowa; 11 from winter, 2 in fall, and 1 in summer. The above report is the first spring record. Reflecting this increase, the Great Black-backed Gull status on the latest checklist of Iowa birds (Kent and Bendorf, *Iowa Bird Life* 61:101-109, 1991) has been upgraded from accidental to casual.

810 North B Street, Indianola, IA 50125

RED KNOTS AT RATHBUN RESERVOIR

CHARLOTTE SCOTT

On 8 October 1992, between 7:45 and 8:45 p.m., I was parked 30-50 feet from a stretch of muddy beach on south Rathbun Lake near the dedication site in Appanoose County. It had been raining but had cleared. For two weeks we had been having very good shorebird activity at this spot, and that morning had been watching Sanderlings, Pectoral Sandpipers, and two dowitchers feeding. Three birds flew in and joined the dowitchers. They were the same stocky, plump shape as the dowitchers but smaller in size and had much shorter bills. They stayed with the dowitchers the entire time we watched and fed similarly--rapid probing in the mud and shallow water, sometimes going so deep their eyes were covered.



The black bills were straight, fairly heavy, and 1.5 to 1.75 times the length of the head. The legs were short and dusky colored. Their backs were gray, upper breasts a lighter gray, and very white on the belly. A distinct line separated the upper breast and white belly though not as decisive as on a Pectoral Sandpiper. The overall breast color appeared much lighter than on the dowitchers. The wings in flight had a faint, fine white line the length of the coverts, and the rump appeared light. The wing edges were dark, and a faint white eye line was visible. The overall appearance was of a nondescript gray, short-legged shorebird.

I have watched Red Knots in winter plumage in Florida and felt comfortable identifying these birds as Red Knots. The gals with me, Dorothy Cornett, Kay Malmberg, and Mary Montgomery and I viewed the birds through the scope, and we agreed on the identification. We alerted other members of the Rathbun Bird Club. At least two others, Ray Cummins and Tom Johnson, saw the knots later that day. They each saw four birds, and agreed with our identification.

Most authorities I consulted agree that the Red Knot migrates from southern South America mainly along the Atlantic Coast and is a rare migrant in the interior. Although for many years there were few records from Iowa, there have been at least eight records in the past decade, all in fall with dates from 5 August to 27 September. Most involve only a single bird. This is the latest fall record from Iowa, and other than 14 seen in May 1934, is the most seen together in Iowa.

320 East Lee Street, Seymour, IA 52590

received from Jim Sinclair

92-23

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species Great Black-backed Gull
 Location Sandpiper Beach, Saylorville Lake
 Habitat Beach
 Date(s) 5/7/92 Time 11:30 am to _____
 Name and Address 810 North B St., Indianola 50125
 Other observers _____

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 behavior and voice.

Large gull, noticeably larger than Herring Gulls which were present.
 Heavy, dark bill
 medium size dark tail band
 Head and neck pale and without pattern
 Back and upperwing white and black - strongly contrasting pattern
 Secondaries dark forming prominent secondary line

The bird was first noticed at 500 yds with naked eye as it loafed with 20 Herring Gulls and 40 Ring-billed Gulls. As I approached from the northeast at approximately 200 yds the bird took wing and flew up river passing me at approximately _____
 Similar species and how eliminated: the only gull which approaches is the Gr. Bl-backed in size is the Glaucous Gull - this species would not have a dark tail band or dark secondaries or an all dark bill

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about identification? no

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: cloudy - 100-200 yds - estimate, 10x by 50 binocs

Previous experience with species and similar ones:
Have observed this species in most plumages
 References and persons consulted before writing description:

Birds of N.A. A.G.S.

How long before field notes made? 10 min. How long before this form completed? 24 hours

100 yds. Viewing conditions were excellent. The pale head and rump clearly contrasted with the patterned mantle. As the bird flew directly away the secondary stripe was very noticeable. Even at these distances the bill, both the dark color and large size, was a prominent feature.

GBB 11 Jan 51

92-23