

Ivory Gull 1 Record Number: 90-38
24 Dec 1990 Classification: A-P
Red Rock Res., Marion Co., IA
S. Dinsmore, et al.
through 12/28; IBL 61(2), 53, 56, 62:22, Dinsmore 1991

DOCUMENTATIONS

- Stephen J. Dinsmore, 24, 26, 28, 30 Dec
- Ann Johnson, 24 Dec
- Mark Proescholdt, 24 Dec
- Randy Pinkston, 24 Dec
- Thomas H. Kent, 25 Dec
- Raymond L. Cummins, 25 Dec
- Jim Fuller, 25 Dec
- Carl J. Bendorf, 26 Dec
- Tanya E. Bray, 26 Dec
- Peter Petersen, 26 Dec
- Diane Porter, 28 Dec

PHOTOGRAPHS

none on file

REFERENCES

- Field Reports: 61:53, 57
- Photograph: IBL 61(2) cover; American Birds 45:338, 1991
- Records Committee: 62:22
- Dinsmore, S. J. 1991. Ivory Gull at Red Rock Reservoir. IBL 61:110-111.

VOTE: 7 A-P

A-P: Excellent Iowa record seen by many obs. An outstanding amount of details within the documents. It would be very hard to turn down this gull after all the photos and articles that have been in the media.

A-P: Great record and a great bird.

A-P: A lovely bird (for a gull). No doubt about this one!

A-P: No questions about this one. Excellent descriptions and photos.

A-P: Excellent set of collaborating documentations. Unmistakable could not be confused with any other gull or bird.

A-P: There are a few differences in how some of the documenters perceived the size and shape of the eye and bill but all descriptions are fairly consistent and consistent with several references I consulted on this record: Seabirds: An identification guide, Harrison: NGS Guide. All field marks are described for a 1st winter Ivory Gull. The photo shown on page 70 of Vol. 5, No. 4 of Birder's World (August 1991), which is a mirror image of the photo from the 1/5/91 issue of the Knoxville Journal Express also puts this into the accepted-p

IVORY GULL AT RED ROCK RESERVOIR

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

At 1 p.m. on 24 December 1990, I arrived below the dam of Red Rock Reservoir, Marion County. I quickly scanned through the 40 or so gulls loafing and feeding immediately below the spillway. The only "different" gull present was a first-winter Black-legged Kittiwake. I then began sorting through the hundreds of ducks when I noticed an all-white gull picking at something on the ice about 100 yards downstream. My initial impression was that the bird was an Iceland Gull because of the size as compared to nearby Mallards. I watched the bird for about 30 seconds before it turned around so I could see the head. I immediately noted the bicolored bill, dark area around the base of the bill, and black speckling on the wings and mantle which identified the bird as a first-winter Ivory Gull.



The bird was perhaps 10% smaller than a Herring Gull, but noticeably larger than a Ring-billed Gull. The most striking feature of the bird was the almost totally white appearance. The head was white except for some fine, black spots on the crown, nape, and cheek. There was a black smudge around the base of the bill, which extended about halfway between the base of the bill and the eye. This feature was less extensive than pictured in most literature, although Grant (1986) notes that this feature can be highly variable. The pupil was dark while the irides appeared yellow. The breast, belly, and flanks were also white, except for several black spots on the breast and a few on the flanks. The undertail coverts were white. The mantle was white with numerous small, black spots. The wings were white, and the black-tipped primaries were evident when the bird was resting. In flight, large, black spots at the tips of the primaries and smaller black spots at the tips of the greater and median secondary coverts were apparent. The basal half of the bill was dark, and was sharply demarcated from the yellow distal half. The shape of the bill was also distinctive; relatively short, straight, and somewhat heavy in general appearance. The legs and feet were black.

The Ivory Gull rarely associated with the other gulls present. It spent most of its time walking around on the ice edge, picking at dead fish. Sometimes it foraged over the open water below the spillway, catching stunned fish. The bird was easy to locate since it spent almost all of its time within 200 meters of the spillway. However, on at least two occasions I watched the bird fly west over the dam and disappear on the frozen reservoir.

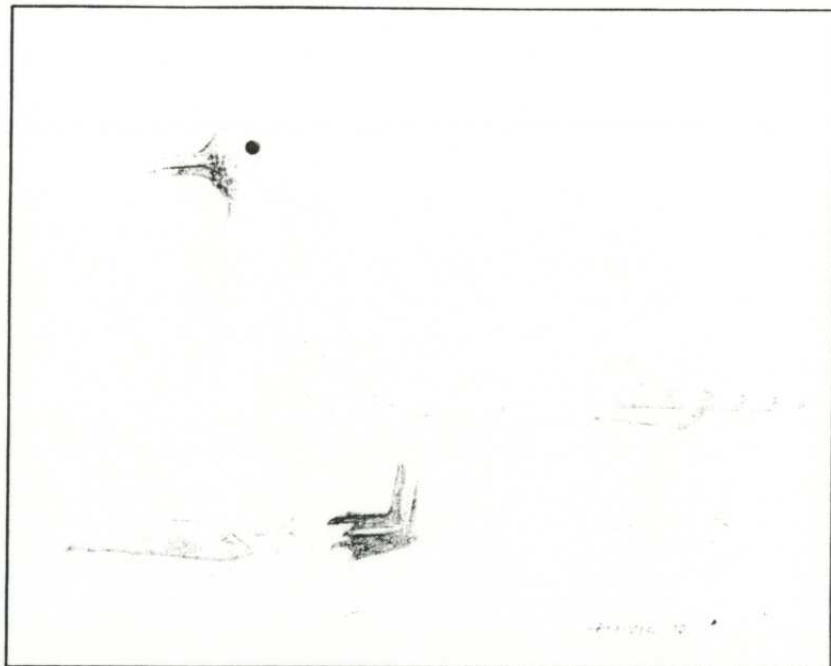
The Ivory Gull was very cooperative, being seen by well over a hundred observers. The last verified sighting was on 1 January 1991. It is interesting that another first-winter Ivory Gull was discovered on 1 January 1991 at Springfield, Illinois (*American Birds* 45: 280).

This is the first accepted record of an Ivory Gull in Iowa. There is a hypothetical record of a first-winter bird at Rathbun Reservoir, Appanoose County on 20 December 1975 (Ayres 1976). Ivory Gull is a very rare vagrant to the Lower 48 states. Most records occur around the Great Lakes and along the northeast coast of the United States. I located 36 records for the Lower 48 States, with most occurring in December-January. There are records from 13 states; Washington (1), Colorado (1), Minnesota (9), Iowa (1), Wisconsin (4), Illinois (1), Michigan (3), Ohio (1), New Jersey (4), New York (5), Massachusetts (2), New Hampshire (1), and Maine (3).

LITERATURE CITED

- Ayres, C. C. 1976. A rare Ivory Gull at Rathbun Lake. *Iowa Bird Life* 46:15-16.
Grant, P. J. 1986. *Gulls: A guide to identification*, second ed. Buteo Books, Vermillion SD. 352 pp.

4024 Arkansas Drive, Ames, IA 50010



Ivory Gull at Red Rock Dam, December 1990. Drawing from field sketches by L. Paul Hertzell.

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IOWA BIRD LIFE

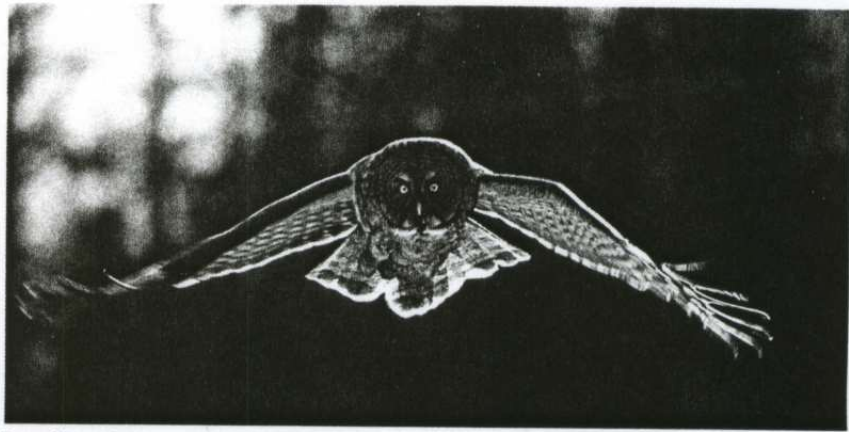
Spring 1991 Volume 61 Number 2



IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION



Cape May Warbler exploiting a most unusual food source for the species, a seed feeder, in Plainfield, Illinois, December 17, 1990. Photograph/Joe B. Milosevich.



In a winter that was notable for several owl species, southeastern Manitoba had near-record numbers of Great Gray Owls, with perhaps more than 300 present. This one was just across the border in Roseau Bog, Minnesota, February 2, 1991. Photograph/Dennis Fast.



Immature Ivory Gull at Red Rock Reservoir, Iowa, December 30, 1990. The first state record, and the high point of the winter for many midwestern birders. Photograph/Timothy R. Barksdale.



This gull at Ocean City, Maryland, on February 10, 1991, showed a combination of characteristics that suggested it was a hybrid Ring-billed X Laughing Gull in first-winter plumage. Photograph/Michael O'Brien.



Eurasian Tree Sparrow in Pierce County, Wisconsin, February 24, 1991. Apparently the introduced population in the St. Louis area is continuing to very slowly expand its range. Photograph/Janine Polk.



Members of the rail and gallinule family are famous for their long-distance wanderings. Even so, this Eurasian Purple Gallinule in Delaware in December 1990 was widely (but not universally) considered most unlikely as a genuine wild stray. Photograph/Colin D. Campbell.

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Rare gull attracts bird-watchers to Red Rock

Arctic gull rarely sighted this far south of Canada

By Tim Schantz

Marion County Naturalist

Marion County had more than one visitor from the North Pole last week. One arrived in a reindeer-drawn sleigh loaded with toys, while another opted for snow white wings as a method of transportation.

The lesser known of the two visitors was an Ivory Gull. Steve Dinsmore of Ames located the bird near the tail waters of the Red Rock Dam.

Ivory Gulls are a rare sight this far south of the Arctic Circle. They breed in the Canadian Arctic and seldom venture south of the Great Lakes.

As the name suggests, the Ivory Gull is primarily white in color with a spattering of black specks. Its legs are black and its bill is dark with a yellow tip. To the trained eye, the bird is much different than the gulls normally sighted in Marion County.

Like other gulls, the Ivory Gull is scavenger. It attends polar bear kills and will compete with other gulls for the scraps. Dead whales are also considered food in a land in which it is difficult to maintain an existence.

During the winter, Ivory Gulls spend their time on drift ice in Arctic waters, hoping to scavenge food.



The Ivory Gull, spotted recently near the Red Rock Dam, has drawn bird-watchers from throughout the Midwest to take in this rare sighting. (Photo by Tim Schantz)

This is the second time this species of bird has been spotted in Iowa. One was reported in 1975 at Rathbun Lake; however, that bird was only

sighted by one person and was not photographed. Its presence was judged "probable" by the Iowa Rare Bird Committee.

Birdwatchers throughout the Midwest have been drawn to Lake Red Rock in hopes of catching a glimpse of this creature from the far north.

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Ivory Gull

Number: 1 1st-winter

Date: 24,26,28,30 Dec 1990

Time: 1:02-4:54 p.m. on 24 Dec

Location: below Red Rock Reservoir dam, Marion Co., IA

Observer(s): Stephen J. Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames

Other observer(s): James Dinsmore, m.ob.

Description of bird(s): At 1 p.m. on 24 Dec, I stopped below the dam at Red Rock Reservoir to look over the ducks and gulls. I quickly scanned the 40 or so gulls that were present, noting that a 1st-winter Black-legged Kittiwake was the only "different" gull. I then began counting Am. Black Ducks among the Mallards. I was about half way through the flock when I noticed a small, all-white gull in with some Mallards. The first thing that came to mind was that the bird was an Iceland Gull because of the small size compared to a Mallard. However, when I saw the bill and face pattern, I immediately recognized the bird as a 1st-winter Ivory Gull.

Throughout my observation of the bird, it continually fed and loafed along the edge of the ice, usually alone, but sometimes in the company of Mallards. I rarely saw the bird associate with any of the other gulls present. The bird showed a distinct preference for the ice edge. It continually walked around on the ice, picking at dead fish.

The bird was almost totally white in appearance. In fact, the bird seemed to glow compared to other gulls because it was so white. The underparts were white, except for a few black specks on the sides and one or two on the breast. The mantle was also white with a very few black spots. The white wings showed a thin, broken line of black spots on the greater and median secondary coverts. The tips of the primaries were also tipped with black spots, larger than those on the rest of the body. The wings seemed proportionately long and very pointed compared to a Herring Gull. The tail was white with black tips to the tail feathers. In flight, the tail was rounded in appearance. One tail feather was broken near the base of the feather shaft and projected downward from the rest of the tail. The head was white except for some fine black spots on the crown, nape, and cheek and a black smudge around the base of the bill. The dark smudge did not extend to include the eye. The smudge around the base of the bill was much less extensive than pictured in the literature, although Grant (1986) notes that this feature can be

highly variable. The iris was dark while the irides appeared dull yellow. The legs were black and proportionately short, especially when compared to the legs of a Herring Gull. The bill was roughly the length of the head, proportionately longer than the bill of a Herring Gull. The stout, heavy nature of the bill was very pronounced, a good adaptation for picking at objects frozen in the ice. The bill was yellow on the distal one third and gray on the proximal two thirds. The bill showed no gonys, but was hooked at the tip. I noticed that the upper base of the bill often showed a knob of ice which presumably built up as the bird picked its food out of the water. When perched, the wings extended an inch or two beyond the tip of the tail. In flight, the long-winged appearance of the Ivory Gull was distinctive when compared to the other gulls present. On the ground, the gait and appearance of the Ivory Gull were very much like those of a pigeon.

Similar species and how eliminated: The bird was really quite distinctive and not likely to be confused with any other gull. The white plumage, black legs, bill shape and color, dark area at base of bill, and pattern of black spots on wings and body eliminates all other gulls.

Optical equipment and viewing conditions: I used Bausch and Lomb 7x35 binoculars and a Bushnell 20-45x spotting scope. Viewing conditions were excellent. Estimated viewing distance was as close as 40 feet.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America and Grant Gulls: A guide to identification

Previous experience with species: No previous experience with this species. I am familiar with Glaucous and Iceland gulls, two other all-white gulls.

How long before field notes written? Written throughout initial observation.

How long before this form completed? 6 hours after initial observation-updated on 31 Dec

DOCUMENTATION FORM
Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species: Ivory Gull - first winter

Location: below dam, Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA

Habitat: some open water but also much ice

Date: 24 December 1990

Time: 3:15 pm to 4:20 pm

Name and Address: Ann Johnson, 532 120th Avenue, Norwalk, Iowa 50211

Other observers: Steve Dinsmore, Pam and Reid Allen, Jim Dinsmore, Mark and Beth Proescholdt

Description of bird: From a distance, this gull looked gleaming white and in fact was difficult to locate when it was sitting on the ice and not moving. It was most nearly the size of a Ring-billed Gull, although I did not see it in the presence of other gulls. I did see it, however, with some Mallards and it was some smaller than the Mallards. The bird had a "pot-bellied" look, nearly no neck, short legs, and a round head. It looked a lot like a large, white pigeon walking on the ice. On closer inspection, it was primarily white with gray to black smudging on the face from the top of the bill to and including the throat, a row of black dots on the primaries, and black edging to the tail which created a semblance of tailband although it was incomplete. There were also some black spots scattered on the wing coverts and a few tiny black dots on the rest of the body including the back and belly. The legs and feet were black. The beady eye was black and stood out on the white face; and the bill, which appeared straighter and lacking the gonydeal angle of the more common gulls, was a bluish-gray at the base but the distal third or so was yellow. The upper mandible extended straight from the head and gently curved at the tip. The lower mandible was relatively straight. When the bird flew the flight feathers of the underwings were a brilliant white and very translucent. The wing linings, probably from the lack of translucency, looked some grayer. The bird kept pretty much to itself, sometimes feeding or resting in the close proximity of Mallards. It fed on small fish which it either went into the water to get or found frozen as it slid and walked around on the ice. Periodically it did some bathing in the water, frequently washing its face. Most of the time it remained in the same general area, but on 28 December it circled once and flew across the dam, presumably out to the ice. It did not return in the following half hour.

Similar species and how eliminated: Identification was pretty straight forward. Other white winged gulls were eliminated by size, brilliant white color, bill and leg color, and pattern of black on the face, primaries, tip of tail, and spotting on the body.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about identification? No

Viewing conditions (lighting, distance, optics): The sky was clear to partly cloudy. The sun was primarily to the left, although during the first observation it was directly at my back. Distance was approximately 200 feet, based on the reading on my scope. Observation was through 7X26 binoculars and scope at 20-35X.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Life bird but much experience with more expected gulls.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Description is somewhat based on discussions of the bird by all parties observing it.

How long before field notes made? dictated immediately after observation How
long before this form completed? documentation written upon return home

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Ivory Gull How many? 1Location? Red Rock Reservoir - (Marion County)Type of habitat? River channel below dam and ice on edgesWhen? date(s): Dec. 24, 1990 time: 3:55 p.m. to 4:55 p.m.Who? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Box 65, Liscomb, Iowa 50148others with you: Steve and Jim Dinsmore, Reid and Pam Allen, Ann Johnson, Beth Proescholdtothers before or after you: Babs + Loren Padeiford, Beth Brown, Curt Nelson, many more

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.

Later seen - Jan. 1, 1991

As Mom and I arrived, the others were watching the gull that Steve had found. It was a small white gull about Ring-Billed Gull size. Its bill was yellow-tipped with a dark bluish base. It had dark streaking around the base of the bill on the face which gave it a dark smudge-look on the face. The legs were dark black. The gull was almost all white with a few black specks on the top side of its plumage. There were several black dots on its folded wings which were the tips of the primaries but ^{were} not seen in flight by me. When it flew, the upper tail was edged with black dots on the tail terminal. It flew a few times and had a buoyant flight. The gull had a nice rounded head. It was pecking away at dead frozen fish on the ice. It was a gorgeous bird!

Jan. 1 sighting - Had a dark eye. Saw some black flecks on back and wing tips when it flew once. It was 25-30 yards away.

Similar species and how eliminated: I can't think of any ones that are close. Glaucous and Iceland Gulls are very white-plumaged gulls but are much larger and have different leg and bill colorations.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Mostly sunny. Sun at my side most of the time. 30-35 yards away - estimated. 8X30 Binocs, a KOWA scope, 20X scope to 40X zoom

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

This is a Life Bird for me.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Natl. Geographic guide for the last bit of notes.

How long before field notes made? 6:45 p.m. that night this form completed? Dec. 26, 1990

41" 175 n

flew

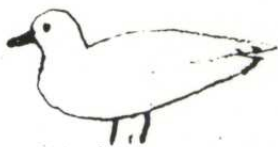
30" 150 n

* 16:12 - 16:45

* 24 December 1990

* Shelf ice below dam at
Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA

* Ivory Gull, Pagophila eburnea,
First winter plumage



* Description (see illustration made
at time of observation):

General - Ghostly pale, it contrasted
even with the snow-covered ice,
whiter than white. Stocky, medium-
sized gull with large round head
and short neck, long wings.

Head - Details not discerned well at distance studied; appeared
all white to me. Apparently, other observers studying the bird through
spotting telescopes were able to see dark feathering at base of bill
and flecks back toward eyes.

Eyes - Appeared large and round, lacking distinct supraorbital ridge.
Color jet black, clearly encircled by white (including lores.)

Bill - Muddled dirty yellowish at distance studied.

Underparts - Absolutely white.

Upperparts - Absolutely white. I could see no dark flecking at
base of neck (upper back) or scapulars. Again, I used no scope and
may have missed small dark flecking.

Wings - Whiter than white above and below except distinct black
mark at tips of 2 (or 3) outer primaries, either 2nd-3rd (4th) or 3rd-4th (5th)
and a hint of fainter dark tips along more proximal primaries.

Tail - White with narrow black terminal band. Band could have been
slightly subterminal.

Legs - Short, widely-spaced, jet black.

Flight - Seen flying twice, once as close as 80 meters. Adept,
wheeling sharp turns in search of fish. Long-winged. Very white
overall but for dark spotting described above.

Voice - None heard.

Behavior - Solitary. Most of time spent picking at fish carcasses
on shelf ice. Short-legged, waddling gait. Once observed catching a
small fish in turbulent water below spillway. See description of flight
above.

* Conditions: Late afternoon. Clear to partly cloudy. Temp. approx.
20°F, light breeze. A severe arctic blast with temperatures to minus
teens immediately preceded this bird's appearance. Observed through
10x40 binoculars for 35-40 minutes at a distance of 100-150 meters
looking northeastward from south side of spillway. (over)

- * Similar species: Iceland Gull (Larus glaucoides) much larger, should have pale legs. First-winter Glaucous Gull (Larus hyperboreus), similar in size to Iceland, was also present below the Red Rock dam and dwarfed the Ivory Gull, also had huge distinctly bicolored bill and pale pinkish legs. Both Iceland and Glaucous show Larus gestalt with less rounded head, more pronounced supraorbital ridge, longer neck and legs, less agile flight.
- * Previous experience: None, my lifer Ivory Gull.

-- Randall Pinkston
526 Reno St.
Iowa City, IA 52245
(319)351-0592

Other birds observed at the spillway:

- Mallard 300+
- * Black-legged Kittiwake 1, 1st-winter
- Ring-billed Gull 3
- Comm. Merganser ~20
- Am. Black Duck 1
- Herring Gull 4
- * Glaucous Gull 1-2, 1st-winter
- Great Horned Owl 1

* see notes

Also, meadowlark, sp. 1 (Mahaska Co.)

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Ivory Gull, 1 1st year, 25 December 1990, Red Rock Res., Marion, Co., IA

Observer: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

Other observers: Before Steve Dinsmore, Randy Pinkston, others; with Carol Thompson, James Huntington, Tim Schantz, Ross Silcock, B. J. Rose, Ken Lowder, John Daniel.

Time: 7:15 to 8:00 a.m.

Habitat: open river water below reservoir dam

Description: Bird on ice patch at 40 yards viewed through telescope from car at 7:25, "Bird fills about one-fourth of field. Almost all white with pure black legs. Webbed feet. Eye is black. Bill is quite large and long, decurved on culmen, and pointed, dull yellow tipped. The proximal two-thirds is a muddy gray-yellow, sort of flecked. There is some black flecking in the face right behind the bill. It's very non-uniform and more gray black than pure black. The primaries extend beyond the tail slightly and each one has a small black tip. The tail is black tipped. The bill is almost two-thirds the length of the head. The bird appears larger than I expected, perhaps as long a body as a Mallard. The bird is pecking at a small fish on the ice." At 8:00, "The bird was at really close range, not more than 20 to 25 feet away. I could see the tail band better. There are a few small black streaks near the wrist on the upper wing and a little darkness on the leading edge of the wing on the underside. In flight the bird looks very white except for very fine black markings." On the sitting bird, there was a slight grayness to the shoulder area. The black markings on the primary tips and tips of tail were quite small, so that in flight they were not conspicuous unless viewed at close range. The dark on the face did not extend to the eye. In flight, the wing beats were fairly rapid and the wings looked broad-based and pointed at the tip.

Song: not heard.

Behavior: sitting on ice picking at fish and flying.

Conditions: As close as 25 feet. Early morning light and mostly overcast. 10x binocular and 20x scope.

Similar species: The black markings, black legs, yellow tipped bill, and black on face of a white gull are distinctive. This bird had much less black than shown on typical birds in the field guides.

Agreement: No one disagreed.

Previous experience: I saw one adult fly by on St. Lawrence Island, Alaska.

References/time used: I didn't look at any field guides until hours after viewing the bird.

Time of notes: quoted notes dictated while viewing the bird; typed: 26 hours.

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF
AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

90-38

1. Species 1st winter Ivory Gull 2. Number 1
 3. Location Redrock dam below spillway Marion Co.
 4. Date 12-25-90 5. Time Bird Seen: 10:00am to 11:00am
 6. Description: At a distance the gull appeared all white. It was about the same size as a Ring-billed Gull and Black-legged Kittiwake. However upon closer inspection the gull showed spots around the base of the bill, wrist area of the upper wing, end of primaries, and tail. The spots were most prominent on the outer primaries. The head was white with a black eye and some dense black spotting around the base of the bill. The bill was gray with a yellowish tip on the distal 1/4. The bill was vee shaped from a side view. The tail was white with 6 or 7 small black terminal spots. The legs were short and all black.
 7. Description of voice, if heard: N/H
 8. Description of habitant and behavior: The Ivory Gull was quite active fishing and moving around over the water a lot, but always coming to rest on the rockbars or ice.
 9. Similarly appearing species: I can't think of any.
 10. Distance (how measured): 25yds estimate 11. Optical equipment: 10X binoculars and 20X x 60X Kowa spotting scope.
 12. Light: Light was poor most of the time looking into the sun, however for about 10min we got a very good view in excellent light from about 25 yds.
 13. Previous experience with species: none
 14. Other observers: Bob Myers, Eugene & Eliose Armstrong
 15. Did they Agree: Yes
 16. Books and references: National Geographic
 17. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description: Two months from field notes taken during the observation.
- Signature: Raymond L. Cummins Address: 609 S. Main St.
Date: 12-25-91 Centerville, Ia. 52544

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Ivory Gull

LOCATION: Tailwaters of Red Rock Dam in Marion County Iowa.

HABITAT: River below reservoir dam.

WHEN: 25 December, 1990 and 1 January, 1991.

TIME: 3:40-4:25PM and 7:30-8:30AM (Not continuous)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, RR#6, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240.

OTHER OBSERVERS: January 1 Tom Kent and Jim Scheib.

OTHERS BEFORE OR AFTER: Mob

COMMENTS: An ivory gull had been reported to the birdline as having been found by Steve Dinsmore on 24 December at that location. When I arrived at the North Tailwaters Area Christmas Day, a bird I felt was the bird in question was standing on ice very close to me (30-40 yards). I watched it for the next 45 minutes both standing and flying. It was also observed to pick at some dead shad at the edge of the ice. The second visit we arrived at the North Tailwaters at about sunrise, and the bird was the first bird seen in the New Year. Again it was very close. We walked even closer (within 30 feet) and photographed it. It seemed to be almost oblivious to us. The description to follow is a combination of both these observations.

DESCRIPTION: The general impression the first time the bird was seen was there was a very large, white pigeon waddling around on the ice. The size was very close to that of the kittiwake which it stood beside on several occasions. It was an almost snow-white bird, which was easy to lose from view against the icy white background. The head was relatively small for a gull, and the bill was small and slender. The eye was dark, and the legs were black. The bill color was interesting. From a distance it appeared gray with a yellow tip. In good light and under high magnification, the basal two-thirds of the upper mandible was a greenish-yellow color, while the basal two-thirds of the lower mandible was lighter with a gray-yellow color. The tip one-third was a golden color. Below the eye and on the throat, there was a smudged gray area, that looked almost like the bird had dipped into soot. This was a very light gray color, and there were also round bb sized dots of gray distal to that area. On the folded wing, there were black V-shaped areas on the primaries, with the V pointing toward the distal. There were also small black dots on the forward portion of the secondaries. In flight, these black dots could be seen on the upperwing. In flight, the tail was only slightly rounded, and each feather of the tail had a black spot

very close to the edge. On January 1rst, the leftmost tail feather looked broken or askew, a feature I had not noted on the previous viewing. In flight, it seemed to be bouyant, but I really didn't notice anything unusual about it. The underwing in flight did not show any black markings.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The only other very white gulls are first or second winter glaucous and iceland, both of which are larger, have more massive bills, which are all dark or flesh tipped with black in the first and second winter (white) birds. Their legs are pink also. There are no black markings on the wing or tail, and no gray smudging on the face and throat of either of those birds.

VIEWING CONDITIONS: The bird was viewed at varying distances and from many directions, both standing and flying. Christams day was clear and in the late afternoon, and New Year's day was early morning and also clear. Distances varied from 25-300 feet. Optical equipment was a KOWA TSN4 telescope with 20-60X zoom lens, and Swift Audubon binoculars (8.5 X 44).

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: None.

REFERENCES: National Geographic Society field guide, and Seabirds by Harrison.

FIELD NOTES: The notes on Christmas Day were made immediately. The only difference noted during the second viewing was the askew tail feather.

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Carl J. Bendorf
845 Cypress Court
Iowa City, IA 52245

Ivory Gull - 1 first winter
December 26, 1990 approx. 7:15 am to 7:45 am
Red Rock Reservoir (north tailwater), Marion C.

Tom Kent called me on the 23rd and said that Steve Dinsmore had discovered an Ivory Gull at this location. On the 26th, Jim Scheib and Dick Tetrault of Iowa City and I arrived before sun-up. It was minus 4 degrees with a very light wind. In the faint light we could see hundreds of mallards and some Canada Geese milling around in the open water areas. At about 7:10, I saw a sub-adult Ring-billed Gull fly by. About 5 minutes later, I spotted an all white looking gull flying from the direction of the dam. Over the next half hour or so, we watched this bird fly back and forth or perch on the water or ice at distances estimated at 10 to 150 yards. The following is a transcription of notes I dictated into my recorder immediately after we got back into the car (it was too cold to write or dictate outside):

"A gull, primarily all white with very minimal or faint brownish or blackish speckles on the mantle and scapulars... a few more black dots at the {greater wing covert area on the upper wing}... very faint black specks on the wing tips... all white tail with some spots forming a terminal type band. The tail was slightly rounded. The legs were black. The eye was black. The bill was yellowish at the tip and grayish-blue at the approximately proximal 2/3. At the base of the bill, it was difficult to determine what was bill and what was grayish feathering at the base. There was also something stuck at the top of the base of the bill like ice or a feather sticking up.

When the bird sat immediately adjacent to the Ring-bill, it was approximately the same size. It was definitely heavier chested but in flight the Ring-bill had longer wings. The Ivory had a more buoyant flight."

Several times, the Ivory Gull flew up and down the length of the open water area; sort of like cruising back and forth. Four or five times, it landed on the ice and immediately pulled a small frozen-looking fish out of the cold slush. One time, it was dive-bombed by the lone Ring-bill and it took off with the Ring-bill in close pursuit. After some evasive moves, it dropped the fish into the water and the Ring-bill couldn't find it. The kind of floating and buoyant flight was very distinctive. It also had a unique profile as it stood and walked; with its big chest it seemed almost to waddle like a pigeon.

When we left, the bird was perched on the ice and Tanya Bray and party had just arrived (but on the other side of the tailwater so we couldn't really talk to them). Besides the two birds described above, there was a first winter Black-legged Kittiwake present.

Conditions: It was early morning light off to our left as we looked mainly south. I used 10X40 Zeiss binos and my 22 X scope as well as Scheib's 20X Kowa scope. We were slightly elevated over the river and at the distances listed above, we were often at point-blank range.

I have never seen Ivory gull before. I don't think there are many similar species to consider; this bird and this species are unmistakable.

The description in quotes above was dictated immediately after the sighting. This full documentation was typed up on the 27th.

Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*); One First Winter.

December 26, 1990; 7:42-8:10 a.m. 9:45-10:05 a.m.
Red Rocks Reservoir, Marion County

Observer: Tanya E. Bray, 1107 Ironwood Court, #186, Bellevue, NE 68005

With me: Alan Grenon, Rick Wright
Before me: m.ob.

Description:

A snow-white, stocky, medium sized gull. The head was completely white except for black spots smudging the area below the lower mandible and on the chin. The eye was large and black; surrounded completely by white feathers of the head. The bill was dark gray-green with approximately the distal third yellow. The bill was not heavy or bulbous; it seemed proportionally "just right" for the size of the bird. The bird was so compact looking; a "no-necked" appearance. The mantle was white. There were small black dots on the wing coverts, and pale gray spots on the tertials. The wings were long extending considerably beyond the tail when the bird was standing. Primaries tipped with thick crescent-shaped black spots. Underparts completely white. Tail white with very thin black band made of separate black spots on tips of rectrices. Short black legs.

In flight, wings were long and narrow compared to the plump body and appeared totally white except for spots on tips of primaries. Tail was relatively short.

Behavior: Sat on ice eating a dead fish, ripping fish apart by holding fish with feet, and tearing at it with bill, swallowing large pieces. Flew to open water and swam with Mallards and one Ring-billed Gull for a short time before flying over the dam and out of sight. Later (9:45 a.m.) Ivory Gull was again sitting on ice with another fish. Flew and picked up another dead fish frozen in very thin ice.

Similar species: Albino gulls eliminated by black legs, bill color, and black spots on primaries and wing coverts. No other gulls are even close!!

Light: Sun just up, to the right of observers during first observation at South Tailwaters Area. Later moved to North Tailwater Area where light was even better.

Distance from bird: Closest in flight: approximately 75 feet.
Seated on ice: approximately 175 feet (estimated).

Written from notes made 5 minutes after sighting. This report written 10 hours after sighting.

Equipment: 7 x 26 binoculars, 25 spotting scope

Ivory Gull - imm-
 at Red Rock Res. Dam - Marion Co. IA
 Dec. 26, 1990, 8:02-8:08 A.M.
 seen by Peter + Mary Lou Petersen + Kelly McKay
 using a Swift zoom scope at 30-35X + 10X40 Zeiss Binocs

Small, basically white gull, seen standing with
 an imm. Ring-billed Gull at one point and bathing
 on shore. Bird about Ring-billed size, legs black, bill
 grey with lighter appearing tip. Smudgy grey on face
 between eye + bill, black primary tips + tail tips. Not
 seen in flight. Eye dark. Seemed shorter-necked than
 Ring-bill.

Similar species - Iceland larger, pink legs, bill darker
 light with dark tip.

Glaucous - much larger, pink legs, bill dark tipped.

Previous experience - saw Mass. imm in 1976, have
 seen adults in the high arctic.

Books consulted prior to obs. - none.

after - checked picture in Geo guide to
 confirm all field marks.

Sun at about a 30° angle off bird + behind it, but
 not shining on that area of river due to low angle.

Record No. 1381

Documentation of Iowa Sighting

4 Ltr Code IVGU

NGS-158 / G-140 / PE-84 / PWpl-33 / AMG(II)-82 / BH-178

First Name	Ivory			Notes See accompanying documentation.			
Last Name	Gull						
Sci Name	Pagophila eburnea						
How many?	1	Date	12/28/90				
City		St/Prov	IA				
Co.	Marion	Nation	USA				
Place Code	RED	Red Rock Reservoir					
Hab. Code	R	River					
St. Life List	Yes	N.A. Life List	Yes				
Flag 1	Yes	Flag 2	Yes				

DESCRIPTION: (Taken verbatim from my notes, made while bird was in view.) A white gull is walking on the ice at the tail waters of Red Rock Reservoir. It is exactly the color of the ice, purely white except for a black spot at the end of each tail feather and at the end of each primary. There are a few brown specks on the mantle. Tail slightly rounded when spread. The bird has short black legs and webbed black feet. There are dark smudges around the base of the bill and onto the face. The bill is dark at the base and light at the end. The eye is black.

This bird has gross taste in food. It is eating things off the ice that have already passed through the digestive tracts of the ducks.

After a while it flew up over the dam and was lost to view.

OTHER VIEWERS: Ann Johnson and others. No one had any question about what the bird was.

VIEWING CONDITIONS: Bird was closer to north bank. I was on south bank, directly across from bird. It was a long way off. I was using Kowa scope and Leica 10X40 binocs and could see the details quite clearly and unequivocally. I watched the gull for about half an hour. Weather was very cold (a break of several hours between days of hazardously icy driving conditions).

OTHER SPECIES, HOW ELIMINATED: Pigeon doesn't have that kind of feet. Color of mantle, legs, bill and face around bill, eliminate other light gulls such as glaucous and Iceland.

REFERENCE MATERIALS CONSULTED: I studied the regular field guides before viewing bird. I did not refer to them between viewing bird and writing description. I am typing up this report on Feb. 28, 1991.

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