

Black-legged Kittiwake
15 Mar 1992
L. Macbride, Johnson Co., IA
*Scheib
IBL 62:78, 63:70

Record Number: 92-24
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

James Scheib, 10 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, IA 52240
(6/30/93)

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 62:78
Records Committee: IBL 63:70

VOTE: 6 A-D, 1 NA

A-D, General description, bill color and auricular patch confirms this record. Nevertheless, I would encourage the observer to be more specific in the description. Specific size comparison with the accompanying Ring-bills, as well as more complete description of wing (absence of windows or other white in wing) would have been helpful.

A-D, The description fits an adult winter plumaged Black-legged Kittiwake.

NA, I base my vote, at least for now, on the following comment from the Regional Editor (Ken Brock, personal letter): "The adult Kittiwake caused great concern. The head and bill descriptions sound convincing; indeed I can think of no more likely species with these characters. Unfortunately, beyond these marks little is mentioned. For example neither bill shape, leg color, eye color, head shape, nor tail shape were observed. Also missed was the upper part of flight pattern; adults show flight feathers that are noticeably paler than [sic] the remaining upperparts (examine flight photos in Grant). Further, lighting conditions during the perched observation were poor. In 22 years birding on L. Michigan I have seen only one adult, and Kittiwakes are seen here annually. As confirmed in your book, inland adults are extremely rare. In view of the astonishing level of this sighting, I am not convinced that the evidence presented is adequate."

A-D, Size really not noted, though presumed by mentioning Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gull. What shade of gray were the wings? Tail shape not noted either. Overall other species eliminated, though not directly. I believe this record is beyond reasonable doubt because of head coloration and markings and yellow bill.

A-D, Good identifying details provided for a Black-legged Kittiwake.

REVOTE: 5 A-P, 2 NA

NA, After reviewing letter from Editor details are insufficient.

A-D, Despite the fact that some features of this bird were not described, I still feel the combination of field marks that were noted are sufficient for me to feel confident that this bird was correctly identified.

A-D, I share some of the concerns expressed by our Regional

Editor, especially with regard to the description of the wings. I was concerned about this in my first review, except that I mistakenly used the term windows when I meant mirrors. Only a little more detail on the part of the observer would have eliminated the questions raised by Mr. Brock. For example, a size comparison with the accompanying Ring-bills would have been good -- the term "a medium sized gull" was not very helpful. Despite the problems with the documentation, I cannot imagine what else this bird might have been. Mew and Ring-billed Gulls have yellow bills but the head marking do not fit. The possible hooded gulls are eliminated by bill color or other factors. Back to Mr. Brock ... I cannot refute his contention that adult BLKs are extremely rare in the Midwest. So are adult Iceland, Thayer's, and Glaucous, but all have been found in Iowa recently. I feel that in the case of this record, the argument against the probability is offset by the diagnostic field marks.

A-D, The regional editor seems quick to dismiss this record based on the lack of detail, yet he accepts the bill color, eye crescent, and grey nape as fitting an adult kittiwake. He also suggests no other bird that fit this pattern.

NA, Bill size and shape, size compared to ring-bills, and leg color would have been very helpful. Could this have been a ring-bill with smudge on head? In view of the rarity and viewer's lack of experience with this species, I will take the conservative view.

A-D, After checking numerous reference sources I cannot find another gull species with the head pattern and color as described in the documentation. The combination of a "dark, black eye crescent behind the eye and then behind it a large gray patch extending rearward to the back of the neck. The bill was thin and yellow." make this an adult Black-legged Kittiwake. This is diagnostic of this species. It would have been great to have had the additional information mentioned by our regional editor but if the field marks as listed are diagnostic then we have to accept the record as being a good record. The probability does exist that an adult or possibly a second winter Black-legged Kittiwake could show up in this part of the country (however small the probability is) if one was seen on Lake Michigan.

A-D, While more details of the bird would have been beneficial to consider, I feel adequate, definitive details were provided for an adult Black-legged Kittiwake. Ken Brock's comments were good and interesting. However, when an Ivory Gull, Iceland Gulls, Great Black-backed Gulls, and Little Gulls can show up in Iowa lately, seeing an adult Black-legged Kittiwake, which is quite rare in the Midwest, is not an unlikely possibility.

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Winter Adult Black-legged Kittiwake *How Many?* one

Location: South arm of Lake Macbride, Johnson Co.

Type of habitat?: Lake

When? Date(s): Sun., March 15, 1992 *time:* Approx. 10:00 am to 10:05 am

Who? your name and address:

James Scheib, 10 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, IA 52240-9148

Others with you: no one.

Others before or after you: None known

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.

Viewed from the parking area at the turnoff to the north arm, the medium sized gull was sitting with three Ring-billed Gulls half way across the lake directly south of the parking area. I immediately saw that it had head markings so I put my window-mounted scope on it to study it. There was a dark, black eye crescent behind the eye and then behind it a large gray patch extending rearward to the back of the neck. The bill was thin and yellow. The wings were gray. Not wanting to miss the bird in flight I studied it for about five minutes without consulting a field guide, which was in the back of the car. As the bird flew E toward the causeway I could see the black-tipped gray wings and a white tail. I found all the markings described in the center figure at the top of p. 158 of the second edition of the National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America. Leg and foot color could not be determined.

Similar species and how eliminated: I was thinking that it was a Bonaparte's Gull, but the bill was the wrong color and the gray hood was prominent like in the field guide for the Black-legged Kittiwake. I believe the BLK is the only gull that has the eye crescent, the gray hood, and a yellow bill.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification?

If yes, explain:

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

The day was clear but not sunny. Light was from the SE; I was looking S about 100 yards; 7X35 Nikon binoculars, window-mounted scope at 20X.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have never seen an adult BLK, but have seen several first-year birds. I studied it thinking it would turn out to be a Bonaparte's, two of which I found on the south arm the next week. Neither had the gray patch behind the eye crescent and each had black bills. The Bonaparte's were also notably smaller than the Ring-billed.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Second edition of the National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America; Seabirds, an Identification Guide by Harrison, 1983. See illustration 241b in Harrison.

How long before field notes made? Immediately this form completed? 3 weeks.

MAIL TO; T.H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include sex, age, date, time of day, location, and behavior. Also mention color and behavior.

Viewed from the parking area at the far end of the north end of the median sized gull was sitting with three Ring-billed Gulls half way across the lake directly south of the parking area. I immediately saw that it had head markings and a dark window-mounted scope on it to study it. There was a dark, black eye crescent behind the eye and then behind it a large gray patch extending rearward to the back of the neck. The bill was thin and yellow. The wings were gray. Not wanting to miss the bird in flight I studied it for about five minutes without consulting a field guide which was in the back of the car. As the bird flew toward the car, I could see the black-tipped gray wings and a white tail. I found all the markings described in the center figure at the top of p. 188 of the second edition of the National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America. Sex and age could not be determined.

Similar species and how eliminated: I was thinking that it was a Bonaparte's Gull but the bill was the wrong color and the gray hood was prominent like in the field guide for the Black-jagged Kittiwake. I believe the BIK is the one and that species eye crescent, the gray hood, and a yellow bill.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification?
If yes, explain

Viewing conditions: fine lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment. The day was clear but not sunny. Light was from the SE; I was looking S about 10 yards; 7XSS Nikon binoculars, window-mounted scope at 20X.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have seen better even an adult BIK, but have seen several first-year birds. I studied it thinking it would turn out to be a Bonaparte's, two of which I found on the south end the next week. Neither had the gray patch behind the eye crescent and each had black bills. The two species were also notably smaller than the Ring-billed.

References and persons consulted before writing description