

Lesser Black-backed Gull
29 Oct 1994
Red Rock Res., Marion Co., IA
*Eugene Armstrong
IBL 65:15, 82

Record Number: 94-42
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Eugene Armstrong [2/23/95]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 65:15

Records Committee: IBL 65:82

VOTE: 3 A-D, 4 NA

A-D, I'm not sure this gull was correctly aged, but the black bill and the perception of size slightly larger than Ringbill carries the ID in any case. First winter Herring Gull is brown, not black and white as noted by the observer, and Ring-bill does not have scaly back, also noted by observer. Observer needs to include distance of view in documentations.

NA, I feel that this 1st summer/juvenile plumage is hard to verify. The scaly back pattern and black bill are good characters, but I think the wing pattern must be seen to eliminate Thayer's, California and dark billed Herring gulls in first summer plumage.

NA, Before identification of gulls is possible, they must be aged. This bird was judged to be a 1st summer bird, based, I think, on the dark bill and white, streaky head. While it is not impossible for a summer bird to be in a delayed molt in October, the bird should be showing a great deal of feather wear. I need a bit more information to clarify the aging before judging the identification. The description of the back as "very scaly" suggests more of a fresh plumage and may point toward a first-winter gull. While the scaliness of the back, the dark bill, and the white head are to a certain extent suggestive of Lesser Black-backed, the variability of size and pattern of Herring Gulls cannot easily be dismissed. Without observation of the double row of dark secondaries of the bird in flight, I don't believe the Herring can be unequivocally eliminated for any record of 1st winter Lesser Black-backed seen in Iowa.

NA, Ken Brock, regional editor of Field Notes, wrote as follows, "Lesser Black-backed Gull: Documentation inadequate. I would never identify (or accept) a first-year Lesser without the upper wing pattern (i.e., dark greater wing coverts and little contrast between inner five and outer five primaries). The bird might well have been a Lesser, but the description was not convincing."

NA, This was a tough call. I am troubled by the lack of observation in flight, no mention of the distance from the bird (could it have been flushed?; if distant, bill might indeed not have been completely dark). I don't think contrasty appearance is necessarily conclusive for this species; a bird below Red Rock dam at the time of the Ivory Gull sure looked like a Lesser BB to some, including visitors from Kansas City, but BJ Rose among others considered it a contrastingly-marked 1st winter Herring. Some observers overlook the difference between juvenile (dark) and 1st-winter (contrasty, often with pale head and rump) Herring Gulls. Overall I am not convinced that this ID can be made on a bird at rest from an unspecified distance.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

94-42

What species? Lesser Black-backed Gull - 1st summer How many? 1

Location? Red Rock Lake

Type of Habitat? Lake

When? date(s): Oct. 29, 1994 time: 11:15 AM to 11:35 AM

Who? your name and address: Eugene Armstrong
Eloise Armstrong - Cal and Bernice Knight

Others with you: Maridel Jackson - Barb Bettis

Others before or after you: No one

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, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

1st summer plumage - Ringbill and Lesser black-back sitting about 150 yds. apart. The bird had an all black bill with a defined gony angle of the lower bill. White head with some streaking, slightly larger than a ringbill. Scapular pattern over the back. Mantle and scapulars were white and black. A very scaly pattern. White reflected the sunlight making it appear very bright. Wing tips were ~~black~~ dark, short black band on end of tail. Dark eye. Bird not seen flying. Leg color not seen. Only young gull with an all black bill. Definitely not a ringbill or herring.

Similar species; how eliminated:

Ringbills never have a scaly pattern over the back or an all black bill. Smaller than a herring gull. Herrings only have a black bill when they are in brown juvenile plumage. 1st summer herring has a $\frac{2}{3}$ rd pink bill.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? No
If yes, explain:

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

Very easy looking sunlight - observed for about 20 min. by all with the aid of 20-60 power scope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Seen on Mississippi river many times

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Notes made in field. References consulted (P Harrison's Seabirds) and (P. J. Grant's Gulls)

How long before field notes made? 4 hrs this form completed? awhile

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).