

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Printed: 11/20/00

Sabine's Gull

6 Sep 1995

Johnston, Terra L., Polk Co., IA

*Thompson, *Walsh, *S. Dinsmore, *Kent

also 7, 8 Sep; IBL 66:22, 96

Record Number: 95-54

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Dennis Thompson, 7503 Wildflower Ct., Johnston [*3/24/96]

Phil Walsh, 137 51st St., Des Moines 50312 [3/24/96]

Stephen J. Dinsmore, 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames 50014 [3/24/96]

Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 66:22

Records Committee: IBL 66:96

VOTE: 7 A-D

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Sabine's Gull (1st year) 2. Number: 1

3. Location Terra Lake, Johnston

4. Date: 9/6/95 5. Time Bird seen: 7:00 pm to 8:15 pm

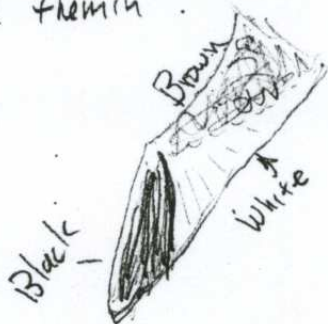
6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field): Medium-sized gull. Upperparts were brownish-grey. Head brownish, lighter around the bill. Underparts white. Dark, thin bill. White tail was slightly forked, with a dark band. Distinctive wing pattern.

Photos were taken, but aren't developed yet. I'll send them in if they're any good.

7. Description of voice, if heard:

8. Description of behavior:

9. Habitat - general:
specific:



10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:

No other gull has this wing pattern

11. Distance (how measured)? As close as 20 ft.

12. Optical equipment:

8x42 Binos. 20x Scope

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):

Good light at first, then dusk.

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:

Once in Iowa, once in Canada.

15. Other observers:

Pam + Reid Allen, Phil Walsh, Eugene + Eloise Armstrong

16. Did the others agree with your identification?

Yes

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:

NGS.

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 3 Days

Dennis Thompson
Signature

Address: 47503 Wildflower Ct.

Date: 9/9/95

City, State: Johnston Ia

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Sabine's Gull (1st year) 2. Number: 1
3. Location Terra Lake, Johnston

4. Date: 9/6/95 5. Time Bird seen: 7:00 pm to 8:15 pm.

6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field): Medium-sized gull. Upperparts were brownish-grey. Head brownish, lighter around the bill. Underparts white. Dark, thin bill. White tail was slightly forked, with a dark bend. Distinctive wing pattern. Photos were taken, but aren't developed yet. I'll send them in if they're any good.



7. Description of voice, if heard:

8. Description of behavior:

9. Habitat - general:
specific:

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
No other gull has this wing pattern

11. Distance (how measured)? As close as 20 ft.

12. Optical equipment:
8x42 Binos. 20x Scope

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
Good light at first, then dusk.

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
Once in Iowa, once in Canada.

15. Other observers:
Pam + Reid Allen, Phil Walsh, Eugene + Eloise Armstrong

16. Did the others agree with your identification?
Yes

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
NGS.

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 3 Days

Dennis Thompson Address: 47503 Wildflower Ct.
Signature

Date: 9/9/95 City, State: Johnston Ia

Documentation of unusual bird sighting.
Phil Walsh
137 51st St.
Des Moines, IA 50312
515-255-2552

95-54

Bird: Juvenile Sabine's gull.
Location: Terra Lake, Johnston, Iowa
Date: 6 September 1995
Time: 7:30 pm.
Conditions: Clear skies, except for a few clouds low in the west, which the sun dropped behind. Pretty good light, though no direct light on the bird. We were on north edge of the pond, looking south/southwest.

Other observers: Pam and Reid Allen, Denny and Cecille Thompson.

Notes (taken that evening):

Medium size gull--on water, grayish back, black wing tips. Black bill, 2/3 -- 3/4 length of head. Very shallow forehead.

Forehead clean white; face in front of eye white, neck white; back of head and neck dark gray, giving a striking two-tone look when seen from the side.

Very busy on the water, swimming about, searching for insects, always leaning forward, picking bugs off the water.

In flight, bold 2 tone wing pattern--jet-black primaries, and inside of them a big, cleanly delineated white triangle. Underwings white, breast white.

Bird flew 4-6 times during the 20 minutes I was there.

The next morning I stopped by again, and made the following additional notes:

7:30--7:40 am; wind 10-15 mph NW; 60 degrees, drizzle, overcast.

Gull on far side of lake; 2 tone head and neck pattern still easy to see. Gets up and flies across lake to directly in front of me, where it lands on water for a minute, then gets back up, circles up relatively high above the lake, then drops back down and hunts at the water's surface awhile, then lands on far edge of lake again.

In flight, tail is often fanned open, and appears rounded, with a dark sub-terminal band and a narrow white terminal. Only once, with tail closed, did tail appear forked.

I noted later that Sabine's is actually quite small; my impression of it as a "medium" sized gull was obviously off the mark. Since there were no other species nearby to compare it with, size estimation was probably better left undone.

The bold white triangles on the upper-wing mark this as a Sabine's gull; the dark tail-band makes it a juvenile. A 1st-winter black-legged kittiwake might show a similar triangular pattern as well as a dark tail band, but should also show a black bar on the inside of the upper wing, a black half-collar, and a dark patch behind the eye, none of which I noted on this bird. A 1st-winter red-legged kittiwake might also show a similar wing-pattern, but would lack the dark tail band.

95-54

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Sabine's Gull

Number: 1 juvenile

Location: Terra L., Johnston, Polk Co.

Habitat: small lake

Date: 7,8 September 1995

Time: 6:18-6:56 a.m. and 11:15-11:38 a.m. on the 7th and 8:11-8:55 a.m. on the 8th

Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50014

Others who saw bird: Denny Thompson, m.ob.

Description of bird(s): I arrived and found a solitary gull resting in the middle of the lake. The bird was clearly one of the smaller gulls, and appeared to be roughly the size of a Franklin's Gull, although none were available for comparison. The crown, back of the neck, and mantle were dark brown. The forehead and face were white. The eye was dark and surrounded by white color. The bill was short, straight, and black. The underparts were white. In flight, the tail and wing patterns were seen well. The tail was slightly forked with a narrow black terminal band. The remainder of the tail was white. The upperwing pattern was striking: outer primaries and their coverts black, secondary coverts dark brown, remainder of wing white. This pattern was muted but still visible on the underwing. The wing and tail patterns were those of a juvenile Sabine's Gull. I returned on 8 September and photographed the bird.

Similar species and how eliminated: The size, wing pattern, and slightly forked tail eliminate other small gulls, especially Black-legged Kittiwake.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with overcast skies on the 7th and clear skies on the 8th. Estimated viewing distance was usually 50-100m, although I did approach to within 5 meters on the 8th. I used 10x42 binoculars and a 20-60x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have seen three other Sabine's Gulls in Iowa and two in North Carolina-all have been juveniles.

References consulted: none

How long before field notes made: written during initial observation

How long before this form completed: 10 September 1995

95-54

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Sabine's Gull; *Number:* 1 juvenile

Location: Terra L., Johnston, Polk Co., Iowa

Date: 7 September 1995; *Time:* 6:30 to 6:55 a.m.

Name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

Others before/with/after: reported by Dennis Thompson on 6 September; Steve Dinsmore and Jim Sinclair were there with me.

Habitat and circumstances: An artificial pond in the town of Johnston.

Description of bird: The bird was first seen resting on the pond as the light came up. It was a small gull, but no other birds were nearby for size comparison. It had a tiny, thin, black bill. The underparts, face, and forehead were white. The back of the head, back and sides of neck, and back were mottled gray-brown. In flight, the outer primaries and their coverts were black, the inner primaries and secondaries were white, and the wing coverts were speckled brown. This gave the wing a three toned effect with a white posterior triangle. The underwing had the same pattern but with a more muted appearance as if shining through from the top. The tail was white with a black terminal band. It was mildly forked. During observation the bird got up and flew around the pond and was seen at the near edge where we were standing.

Voice: not heard.

Similar species: None of the other small gulls have the solid W on the upper wings and back or solid brown involving wing coverts, back, and neck.

Any one have reservations?: no

Light: early morning, overcast, light mist; *Distance:* as close as 20 yards; *Optics:* 10x binocular, 20x scope.

Previous experience: Have seen several in Iowa and many on the West Coast.

References before/after viewing: none.

Time of notes: toward end of observation period; *Final typing:* 4 days