

Slaty-backed Gull

6 Feb 1992

Davenport, Scott Co., IA

*Petersen

IBL 62:55, 63:70

Record Number: 92-06
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Peter C. Petersen, 235 McClellan Blvd, Davenport, IA 52803
(6/30/92)

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 62:55

Records Committee: IBL 63:70

VOTE: 3 A-D, 4 NA

A-D, Description of primaries, "comma" noticed on sitting bird and leg color good for Slaty-backed, and help eliminate Lesser Black-backed.

A-D, Despite the documented presence of other dark mantled gulls at the Quad Cities this winter and the corresponding possibility of confusion with them, this record appears to be correct. The combination of leg color and mantle description appears to eliminate both Lesser and Great Black-backed Gull (Lesser by pink legs, Greater by gray, not black mantle). Firming up the identification is the presence of white in the wingtips separating the gray mantle from the black of the primary tips -- a good field mark for this species. The broad white trailing edge to the wing is subjective, but supportive. Also supportive is the fact that this species has been found in this location in the past. If this record is indeed correct, this could easily be the same bird -- instances of accidental species (including gulls) reappearing in the same location for several years in a row are not unprecedented. I am concerned that of all the birders in the Quad Cities this winter, no one else saw the bird.

NA, The pink legs, size, and dark back eliminate all gulls, but Slaty-backed and Western. The trailing edge description of the primaries is similar enough to both that I cannot eliminate either. The recent vagrancy pattern would favor a Slaty-backed Gull.

NA, An experienced observer sees a gull for 10 minutes and writes a perfect description of a Slaty-backed Gull. That brings out an incredible set of unlikely circumstances. There were many gull watchers on the Mississippi this year and no one else saw a bird that looked like this one? The two accepted Mississippi Slaty-backed Gulls were seen by 100s of people and photographed. I believe that this observer has misidentified several gulls in the last few years. I assume that 120 m. from the Iowa shore is still in Iowa. Why was an Illinois documentation form used?

NA, Documentation not detailed enough to describe this species beyond reasonable doubt. Similar species not completely eliminated as described.

NA, The details provided could fit a Slaty-backed Gull, but I feel that they also could fit an adult Great Black-backed Gull which would be a much more likely bird to appear in Iowa on the Miss. River. The size range on length of a Slaty-backed Gull is

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24"-27" and the size range of a Great Black-backed is 28"-31" and for a Herring Gull is 22"-26". So essentially all three gulls could be the same size especially seen from 120 meters away. Also, at this distance a dark mantled adult gull could seem to vary in the darkness of its mantle. For such a rare possibility I wish more details were provided. I have enough doubts at this time to vote NA.

1. Species: Slaty-backed Gull Number seen: 1
 (If known) Age: ad. Sex: ? Plumage: winter
2. Location (including county): Lindsay Park Boat Club, Davenport, Scott Co, Ia. + Rock Isl. along Miss. R.
3. Date(s): Feb. 6, 1992 Time of day: 9:35 AM to 9:45 AM
4. Observers -- Your name: Peter C. Petersen Phone: (319) 335-7051
 Address: 235 McClellan Blvd, Davenport, IA Zip 52803
- Others present: no one
- Others before or after you: none to my knowledge
5. Describe the habitat the bird(s) was found in and the surrounding habitat:
Ice flow, Iowa side of Miss. River - Fleatoward
7 ft. when flushed.
6. Description: Describe in great detail (but only include what actually was seen in the field (the size, shape and color pattern of the bird(s)). Include a description of the bill, eye, legs, feet, tail, body and wings as well as other diagnostic characteristics.

Herring Gull size - seen with Herring Gull?

Mantle dark grey, wingtips black separated by white
 from dark grey toward trailing edge of wing. Secondaries
 broadly tipped white - very noticeable when in flight.
 Head white, much tan smudging behind eyes + flecking elsewhere
 Legs bright pink, much brighter than Herring. Eye light.
 Bill yellow - some red on lower mand. near tip, no heavier
 than Herring. No flat-headed look. Tail white, white
 chest & belly. white tips on primaries, and window or
 "mirror" on leading + 2nd primary. white perched, white "comma"
 on back very noticeable

Species: Slaty-backed Gull Date seen: Feb 26, 1992 Observer: P. C. Petersen 92-06

7. Similar species (explain how eliminated): Lesser Black-backed Gull - legs not yellow too large, wide trailing edge on wing, white between tips of primaries mantle. Greater Black-backed Gull - too small, mantle not black. Eastern Gull.
8. Describe the bird's behavior: standing on ice flow, flew when flushed away from obs then to right.
9. Describe the song or call notes heard: Not distinguished from Herring Gulls
10. Viewing conditions:
Optical equipment used (type, power): 8x40 Zeiss binocs. 30-35x60 Swift scope
Closest distance to bird (how measured): 120 m est
Lighting and weather: sun from side - nice light - thin o.c.
Was the bird photographed? no By whom? _____ Attached? _____
11. Summarize previous experience with this species and similar species:
Have seen on several occasions in St. Louis in Quad-Cities,
12. Other observers who did not agree with the identification (explain): none
13. List books and illustrations consulted and advice received. How did these influence this description? Checked Geo guide during obs., Sea birds + Gulls - 2nd ed - later they did not influence description
14. How long after observing the bird(s) before field notes completed? 5 min.
15. How long after observing the bird(s) before this form completed? 6 hrs.

Mail this completed form to: Avian Ecology Program, Natural Heritage Division
Dept. of Conservation, Springfield, IL 62701

If you have observed a common bird species during a season of abundance, verification is achieved simply by returning there again in season. If, however, the observation involves a rare species, or a common species out of season or at an unusual location, and you wish to share this experience with the scientific community, special documentation is necessary.

An acceptable documentation consists of one or more of the following: a collected, diagnostic specimen; a diagnostic photograph; a diagnostic recording of the bird's voice; or, an accurate and detailed written description of the observation. It must be emphasized that a request for documentation is not an affront, but an effort to perpetuate a record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for all to examine. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation irrespective of the observer.