

Lesser Black-backed Gull

8 Oct 1997

Coralville Reservoir, Johnson Co., IA

*Fuller, *Kent, *Edwards

2nd year; IBL 68:13, 86

Record Number: 97-41

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Jim Fuller (8, 9, 10 Oct) 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

Thomas H. Kent (9 Oct), 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

Chris Edwards (14 Oct), 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty 52317

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 68:13

Records Committee: IBL 68:86

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, 2nd winter. This species seems to be continuing its expansion.

A-D, Well substantiated by three complete descriptions made independently. 2nd year bird.

A-D, Careful study and discussion of age and other possibilities.

97-41

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Lesser Black-backed Gull (Second Year)

LOCATION: Beach at West Overlook Area just above the Coralville Reservoir Dam (Johnson County)

DATE & TIME: 8 October, 1997 (5:00-5:30 PM), 9 October (7:05-15 AM and 4:20-30 PM), 10 October (7:01-14 AM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240

OTHERS: James Huntington, Tom Kent, Chuck Fuller

DESCRIPTION: This dark mantled gull was noticeably larger (estimated 20%) than any of the Ring-billed Gulls with which it was observed standing and flying. It also had a proportionately larger head and bill, and longer and thicker legs. The head and underparts were generally white, but the breast showed mottled dark spots, and the head had some dark streaking. The wing and back were a dark gray (not black) color, and there was some dark brown mixed in that could be seen while the bird was standing. However, when the bird flew the upperwing and back appeared relatively homogenous dark gray, except for the primaries and some secondaries which were a darker black. There was a dark and wide terminal tail band, which showed a little white webbing between the central retrices. The rump was white with scattered small black spots. The bill was black with some flesh colored streaking in the tip two-thirds, and generally flesh colored in the basal one-third. It also had a small yellow tip. The legs were longer and thicker than those of the Ring-billeds, and the feet were yellow. The lower leg was a dull yellow, and the upper leg was light gray. The eye was dark. In flight, the bird was obviously larger and longer winged than the Ring-billeds, showed the tail band, and the upperwing was dark with a narrow white trailing edge, while the underwing was light, except it was darker toward the tip. While standing, the primary extension was considerably greater than the tail length. Considering the field marks, I judged the bird to be between second summer and second winter plumage.

SIMILAR SPECIES: All other dark mantled gulls in this plumage that are possible are larger and should show pinkish legs.

OPTICS & VIEWING CONDITIONS: All viewings were to the east, but in the mornings before the sun rose. All were sunny days. Bird was standing on a beach at a distance of 75-100 feet. I was using a KOWA TSN-4 telescope (20-60X). During flight, I used Swift Audubon binoculars (8.5 X 44) looking mostly east at distances of 75-300 feet.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen numerous Lesser Black-backed Gulls, but never in this plumage.

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES: Field notes were made at time of original sighting, and added to during succeeding sightings. I looked at National Geographic guide and Harrison's Seabirds during and after sightings. This form was typed on 10 October.

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DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Lesser Black-backed Gull; **Number:** 1 first-summer-2nd winter

Location: Coralville Reservoir near dam, Johnson Co., IA

Date: 9 October 1997; **Time:** 4:30 to 4:40 p.m.

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

Others before/with/after: Jim Fuller found it on the 8th; Jim and James Huntington there when I arrived.

Habitat and circumstances: swimming beach above dam where gulls congregate.

Description of bird: The bird was standing and preening in shallow water on the beach with numerous Ring-billed Gulls. I picked it out in the scopes that were set up by its dark mantle and wings and size that was distinctly larger than Ring-billed Gulls. No Herring Gulls were present for comparison, but I would judge it to be smaller than what I would expect for a Herring Gull. The bill was about twice as thick as Ring-billeds and longer by about 50%. The bill was black with patchy areas of yellow at the tip, base of lower mandible, and, less distinctly, in the proximal part of the upper mandible. It appeared rather uniform in caliber without a pronounced gonyl bulge. The head appeared smoothly rounded and larger than Ring-billeds. The under parts and head were white with flecks of brown on the head, neck, and sides. The wings and back were charcoal gray with smoother texture on the back and darker primaries. The legs were similar to Ring-billeds—dusky yellow. The iris was dark. Before leaving, we flushed the bird in order to see the upper wing surface and tail. The tail had a broad black terminal band occupying the distal half of the tail and with a fuzzy margin with the white of the proximal tail. The wings were broader and longer than those of Ring-billeds. The wing surface at first glance was uniform dark charcoal, but on continued viewing the primaries were almost black and there was an incomplete thin white trailing edge to the secondaries.

Voice: not heard.

Similar species: The mantle color was too dark for Herring or California gulls, and at an age with this much tail band, these species would appear brown rather than black. This bird was much too small for Great Black-backed Gull or any of the accidental dark mantled gull. This bird must be in the age of first-summer to second-winter. A year younger bird would not show the beginning mature mantle feathers and a year older bird would have a more mature upper wing and have little black in the tail. The bill changes are appropriate for the age. Grant and Harrison do not provide many illustrations of Lesser Black-backed Gull at this age, the changes are described by Grant.

Any one have reservations?: no

Light: Sun behind us; **Distance:** 30 yards (estimate); **Optics:** 10x binocular, zoom scope.

Previous experience: The previous birds of this species that I have seen in Iowa were adults.

References before/after viewing: Looked at National Geographic Guide and Harrison while viewing, Grant after typing above description.

Time of notes: none; **Final typing:** 16 hours.

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DOCUMENTATION FORM

For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species: Lesser Black-backed Gull (probable second-winter)

Number: 1

Location: Coralville Reservoir, Johnson Co.

Habitat: Lake and beach.

Date and time: October 14, 1997, 4:30 - 5:50 p.m.

Name and address: Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317

Others with you: Jim Fuller.

Others before or after you:

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.

The bird was seen standing on the beach and swimming in the water, but was not seen in flight. It was perhaps 15% larger and had a larger bill than the numerous Ring-billed Gulls present, but was much smaller than one Herring Gull present. The bill was yellow and blackish, with the basal 1/3 mostly yellow, the middle 1/3 mixed, the distal 1/3 blackish, and the extreme tip pale yellow. The gape was light pink. The eye appeared dark. The head was mostly white, with the forehead, lores, chin, and throat white, a dark brown mark behind the eye, and light brown streaking on the crown, hindneck, encircling the eye, and in the areas above and behind the eye. The foreneck and center of breast were mostly white and very lightly mottled with brown. The sides of the breast, the flanks, and the upper belly were heavily mottled with brown. The lower belly and vent were white. The undertail coverts were white and lightly barred with brown. The back, scapulars, and coverts were mottled with dark brown and dark gray (not black), and were much darker than the Ring-billed Gulls. The greater coverts appeared very dark solid gray. The tips of several tertials and scapulars were whitish with gray mottling. The folded primary tips were entirely black, and projected perhaps two inches past the tail. The rump was white. The tail was whitish, very lightly barred with brown, and with a broad black subterminal band. The legs and feet were very pale yellow. After reviewing Grant's *Gulls: A Guide to Identification*, I think the bird was probably in second-winter plumage.

Similar species eliminated: Great Black-backed Gull is much larger and is blacker-backed.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the identification? No.

Viewing conditions: 40 yards away, full sunlight behind me; viewed with 8 x 40 binoculars and 15-45x telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have seen several Lesser Black-backed Gulls in adult plumage.

References and persons consulted before writing description: *National Geographic*.

How long before field notes made: During observation.

How long before this form completed: One hour.