

Lesser Black-backed Gull  
31 Jan 1987  
Iowa City, Johnson Co., IA  
\*J. Fuller, \*Bendorf  
IBL 57:56, 58:74

Record Number: 87-04  
Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Jim Fuller  
Carl J, Bendorf

PHOTOGRAPH

Carl Bendorf, P-0217

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 57:56  
Records Committee: IBL 58:74

VOTE: 1-I-P, 5-III, 1-IV

III, Documentation convincing for Lesser Black-backed Gull. Bill color is strange but everything else "fits." Could be much darker looking than it really was because of lighting.

III, Excellent documentation by Bendorf.

IV, Leg color not seen. Considered "too dark" for California Gull. Contrasting white trailing edge may eliminate California. Bendorf also did not consider possibility of California. Bill coloration possibly suggestive of California, however. Although both observers were impressed by darkness of mantle, this perception is objective [sic]. Enough doubts (leg color, bill coloration) to preclude positive ID. Western Gull isn't bigger than Herring. Same size to a tad smaller.

REVOTE (at meeting, 30 May 1987): 7-I-P

What species? LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL How many? (1)Location? IOWA RIVER - IOWA CITYType of habitat? RIVERWhen? date(s): 31 JAN, 1987 time: 1:35 - 1:45 PM  
9:55-10:10 to 10:00 AM  
10:10 to 10:15 AMWho? your name and address: JIM FULLER, 6 LONGVIEW KNOLL, IOWA CITYothers with you: CAL KNIGHTothers before or after you: CARL BENDORF

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.

THE BIRD WAS SEEN SITTING ON THE WATER, EXCEPT FOR TWICE WHEN IT STRETCHED ITS WINGS AND ONCE WHEN IT FLEW FOR NO MORE THAN 20-30 SECONDS. IT WAS WITH 12-50 HERRING & RING BILLED GULLS AT DIFFERENT TIMES. IT WAS INTERMEDIATE IN SIZE BETWEEN THE TWO. THE DISTINGUISHING FEATURE WAS A BACK + WINGS WHICH WERE MUCH DARKER (GRAY - NOT BLACK) THAN THE ADULT HERRING + RING BILLED GULLS. THE UPPERWINGS WERE DARK TO THE END EXCEPT FOR A WHITE SPOT AT THE TIP AND WHITE LEADING + TRAILING EDGES. THE UNDERWING WAS GRAY + DARKER AT THE TIP. BILL WAS CONFUSING - A LIGHT (YELLOW) TERMINAL 1/3 AND DARK BASAL 2/3. HEAD WAS WHITE, BUT CROWN + NECK WERE STREAKED WITH GRAY + THERE WAS A GRAY SMUDGE AROUND EYE. TAIL WAS WHITE WITH NO BANDING. LEG COLOR WAS NOT SEEN.

Similar species and how eliminated: I QUESTION BILL COLOR. WINGS + MANTLE NOT DARK ENOUGH FOR GREAT BLACK BACKED TOO DARK FOR CALIFORNIA GULL.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:  
50-150 YARDS. SUNNY 9X36 BINOCULARS +  
SCOPE 20-45 POWER.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

References and persons consulted before writing description:

How long before field notes made? IMMEDIATE this form completed? 6 HOURS

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

## BIRD DOCUMENTATION FORM

CARL J. BENDORF  
825 7TH AVENUE  
IOWA CITY IA 52240

SPECIES: Lesser Black-backed Gull NUMBER: 1  
LOCATION: Iowa City COUNTY: Johnson  
DATE: 31 January 1987 TIME: 2 PM TO 2:10 PM

HABITAT: On Iowa River near downtown Iowa City. River completely open.

DESCRIPTION: Jim Fuller had been watching group of approximately 50 Herring Gulls for past week or so as they moved up and down river in general vicinity. At about 10 AM, he discovered an unusual dark-mantled gull in with the Herrings. At about 11:30 AM, I went to this spot (just downstream from Park Rd. bridge on N side of town) to look but found no gulls. At 1:30 PM, Jim called again to say the birds were back. Upon returning, I found approximately 25 Herring Gulls in the area. About ten were sitting on water and the rest were circling area. I immediately noticed one bird, nearly the same size as the Herrings which had a much darker mantle sitting on the water. After I had a brief glance, all the sitting gulls took off and began to fly back and forth in the immediate area. They then circled higher and higher and flew out of sight to the northwest. During this time, I noted the following features:

No apparent size difference from Herring Gulls.

The mantle of the sitting bird was a very dark gray, perhaps twice as dark as the adjacent Herrings. This feature made the bird stick out like a sore thumb.

In flight, the dark solid gray mantle extended all the way out on the upper wing surface and contrasted with the black wing tips which had 2 or 3 small white mirrors just in from the tips of the outer primaries. There was a distinct white trailing edge to the upper wing surface.

The underwing was not much different from the Herrings although it struck me as being a little darker, not such a bright white.

The tail was completely white above and below.

The head was all white except for some noticeable brown streaking on the top of the head down on to the neck.

The bill appeared to be mainly dark with a large very light area near the tip. No noticeable size difference from Herrings.

Due to the overcast light and because the bird either sat on water or flew around, I could not detect the leg color, although I specifically looked for this feature.

I concluded that this was a winter adult Lesser Black-backed Gull. I took a number of photographs of bird in flight but don't yet know how they came out. Tom Kent and I searched for bird the next day, but did not relocate it.

SIMILAR SPECIES--COMMENTS: All the observed characters are fully consistent with Lesser Black-backed Gull. The combination of mantle color (very dark gray in contrast to black wing tips) and size (same as Herring) seem to be fairly diagnostic for this species.

I would like to have <sup>seen</sup> the legs of this bird, however, this is not totally diagnostic. Grant (Gulls, 2nd edition 1986) says of adult leg color in this species, "Legs deep- or creamy-yellow: a few (as high as 3% in some large samples) have adult plumage but fleshy or greyish legs. These birds usually also have dark on the bill of variable extent, and are then ageable as probably fourth-winters which have yet to acquire full adult bare parts coloration." I did not see the leg color of this bird, but did note an odd darkness to much of the bill.

Other dark mantled gulls (Western, Slaty-backed, Great Black-backed) should have been noticeably larger than Herrings. Some other differences are as noted below:

Great Black-backed: Should appear 20 to 30% larger than Herring, not same perceptible size as was this bird. Mantle color in Great Black-backed is much darker, showing virtually no contrast with blacker wing tips. It also would have much more white in the black wing tips. Grant says that Great Black-backs have little if any head and neck streaking in winter; they are virtually white-headed at this season.

Slaty-backed: The size and several other features might be possible for this species, but Slaty-backs have a diagnostic line of white spots sub-terminally on the 3rd through 6th primaries which separates the gray mantle from the black wing tip. This was not present on this bird.

Western Gull: This and Slaty-backed are not very likely, but are theoretically possible. Westerns are generally stouter than Herrings. My photos of this bird do not show much detail, but do indicate a bird with fairly longish and narrow wings. Westerns have relatively short and broad wings. Western also are mainly white-headed in winter; this bird had brown streaks.

AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT OF OTHERS: Jim Fuller agreed, although we did not see bird at same time.

LIGHT CONDITIONS: General overcast sky with clouded sun at my back.

DISTANCE: 50 to 200 yds. (Estimated) EQUIPMENT: 10 X 40 Zeiss

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILAR SPECIES: Have seen adult winter LBB Gull at Red Rock Res. Have seen adults of all other NA dark mantled gulls.

REFERENCES, PERSONS CONSULTED BEFORE WRITING DESCRIPTION: None.

FIELD NOTES MADE? Within 10 minutes THIS FORM DONE? Next day