

Great Black-backed Gull

6 Dec 1978

Lake Manawa, Pottawattamie Co., IA

*Ruth Green, *James/Sandra Kovanda

also 7 Dec; IBL 49:56, Am Birds 33:286

Record Number: 81-AY

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Ruth C. Green

Sandra S. Kovanda/James Kovanda, Jr.

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 49:56, AB 33:286

VOTE (1981): 4-II, 3-III

III, Sound's OK but always skeptical of gulls, observers probably not experienced with this species.

III, Size OK. Black bill and white underparts: suggestive; am not sure 2nd winter Herring with dark bill ruled out (see recent lit. note Continental Birdlife); inexperienced observers.

III, Almost II -- but observers not independent.

II, Multiple observers, well documented, good description of probable B. B gull. However, no specimen or photos.

II, Well described by reliable observers.

YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER. It seems astounding that breeding of this species may have occurred in both Sarpy and Lancaster counties in 1978, and, as suggested by Johnsgard, information regarding identification must be published to substantiate these reports. However, some evidence obtained from the Fremont County Foray in 1978 adds some credence to these breeding reports. Two separate groups of observers heard a singing bird of this species in Waubonsie State Park, in the same general area, on two different days, 2 and 5 June 1978 (*IBL* in press). Identification was made with extreme care, by comparison of the upward-slurred notes of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher with the notes of the Eastern Pewee singing in the area. Difference in tone could be discerned without difficulty. There remains the possibility that the bird, or birds, heard in Fremont County may have been late migrants, of course.

LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH. I find it surprising that this species is omitted entirely from Johnsgard's paper. Definite evidence for breeding in Waubonsie State Park, Fremont County, Iowa, was obtained in 1977 when adults were seen to feed a fledged bird, and a young bird capable of flight was netted nearby (*IBL* 47:130). Two, and possibly three, pairs of adults were in the same areas in 1978, as found during the Fremont County Foray (*IBL* in press). These sightings, together with the observations of birds in Douglas-Sarpy counties (presumably in Fontenelle Forest) in 1967-69 published in the Spring and Fall Occurrence Reports in *NBR* would surely give reason to include this species at least as a "Hypothetical Breeder" in Nebraska.

— W. Ross Silcock, Malvern, Iowa

Literature Cited:

- Johnston, R.F. 1965. A Directory to the Birds of Kansas. University of Kansas Museum of Natural History Misc. Publ. No. 41
 Whitney, N.R., Jr., B.E. Harrall, B.K. Harris, N. Holden, J.W. Johnson, B.J. Rose, P.F. Springer. 1978 The Birds of South Dakota. The South Dakota Ornithologists' Union, Vermillion, South Dakota.

A SECOND NESTING RECORD FOR MERLINS IN NEBRASKA

On 9 June 1978, while I was examining a Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) nest in Fort Robinson State Park, I heard the excited calls of a Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) to the north, approximately 100-200 yards. Closer investigation revealed a pair of Merlins defending several large pine trees, three of which each contained an old Magpie nest. In the second tree I climbed I found four nestlings approximately one day old and one egg not yet hatched. The young were not located on top of the Magpie nest, but were within the top half. The adult Merlins were entering the nest from the side.

The nest tree, a 40-foot ponderosa pine, was located on an east-facing slope, near the top of a ridge that overlooked a canyon below. The nearest trees were located at least 20 feet away.

This nest is approximately 1.5 miles from the active Merlin nest found on 13 June 1975 (*NBR* 43:78). That nest has been checked each summer since its discovery and found to be inactive.

During the past two summers of raptor nesting investigation I have on two occasions observed Merlins at two locations in the Pine Ridge: northwest of Crawford, in Sioux County, and southeast of Crawford, in Dawes County. Both observations were made in the month of June and occurred within the forest. Attempts were made to locate nests, but to no avail.

These observations seem to indicate that nesting Merlins in the Pine Ridge may be more prevalent than previously believed. It is also possible that since there are no known pre-1975 records of nesting Merlins in the Pine Ridge, this species may be expanding its breeding range into northwest Nebraska, possibly from the Black Hills in South Dakota.

— Ross Lock, Game and Parks Commission, Lincoln

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL NEAR OMAHA

On 6 December 1978 I was viewing a Glaucous Gull at Lake Manawa (Iowa) when a gull that was the same size as the Glaucous landed on the edge of the ice, about five feet away from it. I immediately noticed the striking contrast between the head coloring, which extended down into the breast, to its darker back. The over-all conformation of this bird was what I would describe as

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rather chunky. The next thing I observed was the heavy and large bill, which was totally black. The upper mandible was down-curved, but not the lower. The size and shape were much different from that of a Herring Gull. The mantle was a brownish and lighter color than the blackish primary and secondary wing feathers. This bird had a white rump patch with a black band on the tail, edged in white. Its feet were a flesh color. It matched in every detail the first winter stage of plumage of the Great Black-backed Gull. I watched the bird just standing for about 15 minutes, then it flew a few yards away and I was struck by the very long wingspan and the powerful downward stroke of its wings. The flight and size were very comparable to the Glaucous. It would fly up and come back to almost the same spot. Most of the lake was frozen over, but there were small patches of open water, and the bird was standing on the ice at the edge of one of these patches. I estimate that the bird was 300 to 400 feet from my viewing point on the shore. I watched it through 7x35 Bushnell wide-angle binoculars, and through a Bausch and Lomb spotting scope at 30x. It could be seen almost as well at both 15x and 20x, however. I was facing east, with the afternoon sun at my back. Jim and Sandy Kovanda were with me at the time, and agreed with the identification. When other birders who had gone to see the Glaucous Gull heard about the Great Black-backed Gull they reported that they had seen the bird and realized that it was different, but had not identified it.

— Ruth C. Green, Bellevue

This is apparently the third record of the Great Black-backed Gull in or near Nebraska. Aughey examined "a dead specimen which some Winnebago Indians had shot on the Missouri and brought to Dakota City in May, 1871". (Bruner, Wolcott, and Swenk, *A Preliminary Review of the Birds of Nebraska*, p. 19). One was reported from a few miles west of Aurora 5 April 1952 by Mrs. Kermit Swanson, who was accompanied by five other people at the time of the sighting (*NBR* 20:83, 21:9). Lake Manawa is a cut-off lake, formed from the Missouri in the flood of 1881. It is entirely in Iowa, but about a mile from the present course of the river (and Nebraska). Until the recent construction of the Papio lakes it was the only large body of water near Omaha, and most Omaha birders did not (and still don't) distinguish between sightings there and those actually in Nebraska proper. For the purists, it may be noted that around noon 7 December the Kovandas could not find the bird at Manawa, but they did find it there later in the afternoon. The presumption is that the bird was on the Missouri (and so in Nebraska part of the time) when it wasn't at Manawa.

— Editor

Field Reports
Iowa Bird Life
49:56 1979

Spring 1979

The species marked with + are on the National Audubon Blue List (*Am. Birds* 32:1106, 1978), the Iowa Blue List (*I.B.L.* 45:95, 1975) and-or on Dean Roosa's list of endangered, threatened or declining species in Iowa (*I.B.L.* 46:40, 1976).

Addenda to the Winter Report. Numerous exciting findings were reported too late to be included in the Winter Report, or documented late but in such a way as to remove any doubts. L. Manawa in early December was the place for unusual gulls: A Glaucous Gull seen on December 5-7 (TB, BW et al.) was joined a day later by a very convincingly described first-year Gr. Black-backed Gull (RG, J & SK), only the second for Iowa and the first west of the Mississippi. Jay Stravers furnished meticulous documentation for the male Black-backed Three-toed Wood-

American Birds
33:286
1979

GULLS — Herring, Ring-billed and Bonaparte's gulls were periodically abundant [in the Cleveland area—Ed.], moving with wind and weather and joined by other species at times. All gulls were in poor evidence Jan. 23 - Feb. 7 with fewer than 50 gulls of any species being evident on a single day in this period (M). Other species were most often reported owing to their rarity. The Glaucous Gull was recorded from all six states — two at Louisville Feb. 14-18 (†BP et al.); along the Indiana lakeshore; at Cincinnati Feb. 14-15 (DS) and several locations along L. Erie; Council Bluffs, Ia., Dec. 5-7 (†TBr, m.ob.); Thomas Hill Reservoir, Mo., Feb. 4 (WG et al.); and St. Charles County (five) during the period (m.ob.); Warsaw, Ill., Mar. 1 (†DF) and Spfld., Jan. 5-6 (H) and along the Chicago lakefront. The Iceland Gull was identified at Cleveland (1-2) Feb. 15-18 (M, †RHn); in Lorain County, O., Jan. 6-15 (max. three) and Feb. 9-25 (max. five; JP, m.ob.); and Dolton, Ill., Feb. 17 (†JL). The second Great Black-backed Gull record for Iowa was established at Council Bluffs Dec. 6 (†RG, †et al.); one appeared at Michigan City, Ind., Feb. 23 (†KBr); and the species was termed "regularly increasing" in the Cleveland area with two general waves reported: Dec. 9 - Jan. 22 (max. 52 birds, Jan 12) and Feb. 10 - Feb. 28 (max. 500+ birds on

81-AY
d. m. grave return

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BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT HEARD

1. Species: Great Black-backed Gull 2. Number: 1
3. Location: Lake Manawa, Council Bluffs, Iowa *See also Korade's*
4. Date: December 6, 1978 5. Time Bird Seen: Approx. 4:30 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.
6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern:

I was viewing a glaucous gull, which had been sighted and reported by Dr. R. S. Cortelyou of Omaha, Neb., when a gull that was the same size as the glaucous landed on the edge of the ice about 5 feet away. I immediately noticed the striking contrast between the light head coloring which extended down into the breast to its darker back. The over-all confirmation of this bird was what I would describe as rather chunky. The next thing I observed was the heavy and large bill, which was totally black with a down curve on the end, much different from a Herring both in size and shape. The mantle was a brownish and lighter color than the blackish primary and secondary wing feathers. This bird had a white rump patch with a dark band on the tail edged in white. Its feet were flesh colored. It matched in every detail the 1st winter stage of plumage of the Great black-backed gull.

7. Description of voice, if heard: Did not hear it.
8. Description of behavior. I watched the bird just standing for about 15 minutes, then it flew a few yards away and I was struck by the very long wingspan and the powerful downward stroke of its wings. The flight was very comparable to the glaucous. It would fly up and come back at almost the same spot.
9. Habitat-general, specific. Most of Lake Manawa was frozen over at this time but there were small patches of open water. The bird was standing on the ice at the edge of one of these patches.
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6,7,8.
There were only two gulls at this time there--this bird and the glaucous.
11. Distance (how measured) I can only estimate that it was between 300 and 400 feet from my viewing point on the shore.
12. Optical equipment. I could see the bird very well through Eushnell 7 x 35 Wide-angle binoculars but I studied this bird carefully through a Bush & Lomb Spotting Scope on 30 power. It could be seen almost equally as well on both 15 and 20 power however.
13. Light: I was facing east as I was studying the bird, the afternoon sun was to my back which provided very good lighting conditions.
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: I have been a very avid birder for about 20 years and am very familiar with the regular migratory species of this area to live in.

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15. Other Observers: James and Sandy Kovandca were with me and saw the bird.
16. Did the others agree with your identification: Yes.
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: I was the first person to identify the gull but others readily agreed with me.
18. Books. Birds of North America (field guide) and Peterson's field guide to birds of eastern North America.
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description.

I wrote notes in less than an hour and made notations on my field guide.

Signature _____

Address: 506 West 31st Avenue
Bellevue, Ne. 68005
Date: January 6, 1979

UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTING
at Lake Manawa, Iowa

Date: December 6, 1978
December 7, 1978

Time: 4:30 p.m. to 5:15 p.m. (both dates)

Weather: Very cold - 10 to 15 degrees F.
Lightly overcast

Equipment: Bausch & Lomb Discoverer Scope
(zoom - used at 20 to 40 power)

Observers: Jim & Sandy Kovanda (reporting)
Ruth Green - present December 6, 1978

While observing a reported immature glaucous gull, an unidentified gull was noticed in the same vicinity by Ruth Green. After having studied the glaucous gull, we attempted to identify the other bird. The two gulls were first sighted at rest on the ice. Later, they were flying and swimming with a small flock of common mergansers. The unidentified gull was approximately one and one half times the size of a merganser and of equal size to the glaucous gull. An outstanding feature of the bird was its white head, large black bill, and brown wings. Because of its large size and general appearance, we ruled out a herring gull. It was noted that the wings of the bird extended beyond its tail, unlike that of the glaucous gull. During flight, it showed a black band on a white tail. Also, the legs appeared light in color. From the observed field marks, we arrived at the conclusion that the bird fit the description of an immature great black-backed gull.

We returned the following day at approximately the same time. Both the glaucous gull and the gull in question were again studied under similar viewing conditions. All previous field marks mentioned were again noted.

Sandra S. Kovanda

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