

California Gull 1
27 Oct 1990
Coralville Res., Johnson Co., IA
T. Kent, et al.
IBL 61:20, 62:22, Kent 1991 x 2

Record Number: 90-34
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Thomas H. Kent, 27 Oct
Jim Fuller, 28 Oct
Randy Pinkston, 28 Oct
Carol Thompson, 28 Oct
Carl J. Bendorf, 28 Oct

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 61:20
Records Committee: IBL 62:22
Kent, T. H. 1991. First-winter California Gull at Coralville Reservoir. IBL 61:13-124.
Kent, T. H. 1991. A county big year. IBL 61:65-68.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D: Good documents, unusual that two California Gulls would appear at nearly the same time at distant locations.

A-D: A classic case of careful observations and careful descriptions of a tricky bird.

A-D: Very nice detailed descriptions.

A-D: Good, consistent descriptions from multiple observers. Double wing bars, all dark tail, and size eliminate possibility of other candidates. This is an important find and it should alert others to the field marks and possibility of these in Iowa. I would think this plumage should be more frequent than that of the adult bird(s?) found here in the past.

A-D: Tail pattern seems to conclusively eliminate Ring-billed Gull. Bill color, lack of window in upperwing, and size eliminates Herring Gull. The excellent detail makes it possible to call this bird in hard to identify plumage.

A-D: Very good study of California Gull. All necessary field marks noted and described.

A-D: Many good documentations with good details and descriptions of a very interesting bird in Iowa.

bird with a Swift scope at 30 power. Louise used a Questar. The bird was about 100 meters away with the sun directly behind us. The bird was seen several days later by Jim Fuller.

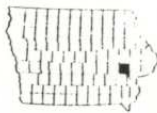
Illinois had eleven records of the California Gull through 1987 (Bohlen, H. D. *The Birds of Illinois*. 1989) and two more for the fall of 1989, one on 12 August-6 September at Rice Lake Conservation Area near Canton and another from 20 October-7 December at Carlisle Lake (*Illinois Birds and Birding* 6:44, 1990). Several earlier Iowa sightings were not accepted by the I.O.U. Records Committee. Late fall gull concentrations should be checked carefully for vagrant California Gulls.

235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport, IA 52803

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER AT CORALVILLE RESERVOIR

THOMAS H. KENT

On 14 October 1990, I went to the Coralville Reservoir area in Johnson County to look over the many shorebirds I had seen the day before just in case something unusual had come in. At 9:20 a.m., I was scoping a large number of snipe, pectorals, and Killdeer that were in shallow pools and low wet grassy areas on the Swan Lake Road west of Greencastle Avenue when I first found the juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. I made the following notes at 10:05 a.m.: "As large as largest pectoral. Overall shape and behavior like a pectoral. First noticed that the bird had a neat rufous cap and prominent white superciliary line. Then noticed buffy color to breast. Bird darker on back and scapulars than pectorals and more rufous overall. Tertiaries neatly edged with rufous, and scapulars and coverts more rufous than any pectoral."



The shorebirds flew to a nearby pond. When I relocated them at 9:55 a.m., I was able to pick the bird out easily and get better looks: "The white line over the eye dips behind the eye, widens, and appears to go to the nape. Black line in front of eye (lores) but not prominent behind the eye. I did not see any color in the eye line nor did I detect an eye ring. I got an excellent look at the breast -- soft reddish-buff with no streaks and no bib line. Breast color tapers off at belly and throat is lighter. Rest of underparts white. Bill all dark. Legs dirty yellow."

I went home and called people. A crowd gathered after noon, but the bird was not relocated until late afternoon. It was with a large flock of pectorals and was seen intermittently. At 6:30 p.m. I made notes of the following additional observations: "Saw fine streaks on sides of breast. Supercilium extended in front of eye but thinner. Saw under rump where there was an indistinct gray smudge."

The sky was overcast in the morning, but mostly sunny in the afternoon. Most sightings were at an estimated 30 to 40 yards with a 20-power Bushnell telescope or through a Kowa telescope with zoom eyepiece.

The only other species it could be confused with was Pectoral Sandpiper. The most distinctive feature of the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was the plain, cinnamon-buff breast without bib line or streaking centrally. The soft breast color shaded off evenly to the lower belly and throat. Some pectorals had very weak breast markings, but on close inspection all had streaks and a sharp bib line. The solid rusty cap differed from any pectorals; some pectorals appeared a bit rusty on the cap, but some streaking was seen on such individuals. The eye line appeared white, and it dropped and widened

posteriorly. Some pectorals had light eye lines but they were off-white, less distinct, and straighter. The juvenile feathers of the upper parts were edged with rufous; this was especially prominent on the tertiaries. Some pectorals appeared to have rusty edging on the tertiaries, but this was dependent on lighting and at least one rufous appearing pectoral had the color more in the center of the feathers with grayer edging. The gray smudging on the undertail coverts I saw once. I only had a glance at a nearby pectoral for comparison, so I was not very confident of this mark.

Sharp-tailed Sandpipers nest in north-central Siberia and migrate through eastern Asia to Australia and New Zealand. Vagrants are noted on the West Coast of United States and to a much lesser extent in the Midwest and the East. They are almost all juveniles found from September to November but there are a few spring records. This is the third record of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in Iowa. The first, on 3 October 1974, was within one mile of the present location (Halmi, N. S. 1974. Sight record of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper near Iowa City. *Iowa Bird Life* 44:106). The second was at Credit Island in Scott County on 30 September 1988 (Petersen, P. C. 1989. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Davenport. *Iowa Bird Life* 59:90-91).

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

WILD TURKEY SWIMMING IN LAKE MACBRIDE

RICHARD JULE HOLLIS

Carol Thompson and I saw a Wild Turkey swimming in Lake Macbride on the morning of 2 December 1990. This particular bird clearly did not intend to swim. But after flying across the south arm of the lake, more or less parallel to the causeway and gradually losing elevation, the bird probably had no choice as it had been airborne for between a quarter and half a mile. It splashed down about 10-15 feet short of the shore. It swam reasonable strongly and buoyantly until it reached shore, climbed up the bank, shook off its feathers, and trotted away.

I have not seen a turkey swimming before nor am I aware of other records such as this. Although records of various land birds swimming are not unusual, this record of such a large land bird being able to swim seems to me to be quite unusual.

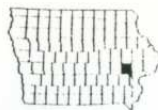
3351 Lower West Branch Road, Iowa City, IA 52245

FIRST-WINTER CALIFORNIA GULL AT CORALVILLE RESERVOIR

THOMAS H. KENT

On 27 October 1990, at Babcock Access, in Johnson County I scanned the hundreds of gulls and shorebirds for about an hour and was about to leave when I saw a dark brown, first-year gull that I thought would be my first Herring Gull of the fall.

The bird was slightly larger than all the Ring-billed Gulls. The brown was not as dark as the usual juvenile Herring Gull that is seen at this time of year. I noted the light-colored bill. Later I saw a flesh-pink bill with small dark black tip. The wings



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were a rather uniform brown with dark primaries. I noted light whitish-buff tips to tertials. When sitting, the bird's greater coverts were dark with lighter edging. The bird was longer than Ring-Billed Gulls and looked shorter legged. The legs were paler (pink) compared to the obvious yellow of Ring-billed Gulls. When the bird raised its wings, I saw a double bar on inner wing formed by greater coverts and the secondary bar. All primaries and their coverts looked dark blackish-brown. I did not see a window effect. The same wing features were seen when the bird was flying and feeding in shallow water with Ring-billed Gulls. The tail was dark with light base centrally owing to the all dark tail and lighter uppertail coverts. The bill was larger than that of Ring-billed Gulls but was not massive. The scapulars and coverts were edged with white. The breast was light brown.

The above observations were made with a 20-power scope at 200-300 yards over a period of an hour. Later, when the bird landed on a spit at about 100 yards, I was able to see it in a Questar with the bird occupying about one-fourth of the field. I made the following additional notes: "Bill long and relatively thin. Lower mandible straight (no bulge). Tip a bit more bulbous, but mostly on the upper part, and proximal culmen also curved upward. Tip of bill black but somewhat smudgy. Inner three-fourths of bill flesh pink with some smudgy black in middle of upper mandible. Rather elongated head with feathers extending onto bill. Head darker gray around eye and behind eye. Forehead lighter. Eye all dark. The wind blew the neck feathers exposing a lighter color underneath. Legs very pale pink. I saw the double bar on inner wing again through Questar as bird took off."

The next morning a number of birders gathered to find the bird again. It was not hard to pick out, as it was the only dark brown gull present. We noticed that the centers of the scapulars were darker than the centers of the lesser and median coverts giving an overall slightly darker appearance to the scapulars. The wing pattern was confirmed, and the size of the bird was as described above.

The many immature Ring-billed Gulls that were present had all reached first-winter plumage as evidenced by gray in the mantle, and they were much lighter overall than the first-winter California Gull. The only other species that I considered was juvenile Herring Gull. The size was small for Herring Gull. The elongated appearance and short legs fit California Gull. Most first-year Herring Gulls that I see in early fall have mostly dark bills that are larger than that of this bird. The double inner wing bar and lighter tertials tips fit California Gull. The overall relatively uniform and light brown color without windows in the inner primaries also made this bird look different from a Herring Gull. Serendipitously, I had an opportunity to study first-year California Gulls in California just eight days earlier.

The breeding range of California Gull is as close as northeastern South Dakota and many have been sighted to the east of Iowa, so it is a bit surprising that this species was not confirmed in Iowa until 1989 when an adult was at Davenport on 23 November (*IBL* 61:85, Petersen, P. C. 1991. California Gull at Davenport, first accepted Iowa record, *Iowa Bird Life* 61:121-122). Another adult was at Saylorville Reservoir from 8 September to 14 October 1990 (*IBL* 61:20). The bird reported here is the third record for Iowa and the first first-winter bird. Although first-winter birds could easily be passed off as Herring Gulls, I think this experience will allow me to recognize the next one.

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

I.O.U. BUSINESS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Indianola, 13 September 1991, 6:00-7:45 p.m.

ANN BARKER SUBSTITUTING FOR SECRETARY HILDA SICKELS

Members present: Ann Barker (presiding), Eloise Armstrong, Bob Cecil, Rick Hollis, Diane Porter, Mark Proescholdt, Harold White. Also present: Francis Moore, Jim Sinclair, Jim Dinsmore.

Reports

The minutes for the 30 March 1991 meeting were approved as distributed (motion by Porter, seconded by Armstrong).

Treasurer: Copies of the revised 1990 financial statement and the statement for 1991 to date, prepared by Allen, were distributed. The revised 1990 statement was published in *Iowa Bird Life* vol 61, no. 2. The 1992 budget will be considered at the fall board meeting. All committee chairs, officers, and others responsible for I.O.U. funds should submit budget requests to Barker by 15 October, so that she and Allen can prepare a proposed budget. Allen requested the board's guidance in deciding whether to renew a 3 month CD. It was moved (Hollis, seconded by Cecil) to allow the treasurer, in consultation with the president, to decide whether to renew CDs with terms of 3 months or shorter. The motion carried.

Committee Reports

Records: Carl Bendorf recently resigned as Secretary. The 1989 annual report will be published in an upcoming issue of *Iowa Bird Life*. Francis Moore indicated that all 1990 records have been reviewed, and Bendorf is preparing the annual report. Voting on the revised checklist was just completed. Once it is compiled, a revised field checklist will be prepared. Moore has printed 800 copies of the 1987 checklist to be used until that time.

Publications: The committee has recommended that Dave Edwards be reappointed to a second 5-year term to be completed in 1996. It was moved (Cecil, seconded by White) to do so. The motion passed. *Iowa Bird Life* editor Jim Dinsmore indicated that the recent issue was slightly over budget. He estimated that costs for the journal for 1991 may be close to \$4,300. It was moved (Porter, seconded by Armstrong) to approve this level of spending for 1991. Motion carried. The revision of *Birding Areas of Iowa* was discussed. Hank Zaletel is in charge of the project with the assistance of John Fleckenstein. The committee recommended a ringbinder format with copies of birding areas articles to be loosely inserted in IBL. Dinsmore indicated that this plan would unduly increase both cost and workload. The board felt that it would rather see a compilation of articles in a bound format. It was suggested that authors be invited to update maps and content prior to publication. The committee recommended that a membership list be published and mailed with the next available issue of IBL. Allen and Dinsmore are preparing this. It was moved (Hollis, seconded by Porter) to authorize \$200 from the operating fund for printing of the list. The motion passed.

Library-Historical: Dinsmore reported that the committee recommended reappointment of Tom Kent, Jim Dinsmore, and Hank Zaletel to serve 5-year terms (two of which are retroactive) ending in 1994, 1995, and 1996 respectively. It was moved (Armstrong, seconded by Porter) to do so. The motion carried.

Membership: Presently the committee is composed of chair Jim Sinclair and, by virtue of her office as treasurer, Pam Allen. All terms of former members have expired, and no new appointments have been made. The committee recommended that Sinclair be reappointed to a 2-year term ending in 1993, and that the following appointments be made: Ann Johnson, 2-year term ending in 1993, and Diane Porter and Mary Jo Hartogh, 2-year terms beginning in 1992 and ending in 1994. It was moved (Cecil, seconded by White) to do so. The motion carried. Changes in the committee's bylaws were approved by the board in 1987, but never published. They will be published in *Iowa Bird Life* when space is available.

Education: Rick Hollis (Chair), Linda Zaletel; Beth Brown; and Diane Porter were reappointed. The Iowa Conservation Education Council has pledged \$500 toward publication of the curriculum package.

Big Day: Co-chairs Ray Cummins and Eugene Armstrong were reappointed. The 1991 awards will be presented at the banquet.

Atlas: Carol Thompson (Chair), Bob Cecil, Barb Wilson, John Fleckenstein, and Jim Dinsmore were reappointed. The committee is working with the D.N.R. toward publication.

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FRONT COVER: Mississippi Kite, Clive, Polk County, July 1991. Photo by Reid Allen.

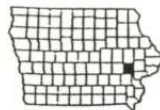
INSIDE BACK COVER: Editorial Staff, Subscription/Membership Information,
Instructions to Authors, Officers, Board of Directors, Standing Committees.

BACK COVER: Meeting Dates, Report Deadlines, Birdline, Materials Available.

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A COUNTY BIG YEAR

THOMAS H. KENT



Many birders like to play games that involve finding species of birds in defined areas over defined periods of time. Games are a strong motivator of human behavior and tend to stimulate research, planning, and intensive activity. Personally, I get much more out of my birding activities if I have a plan or game involved. For 1990, I chose a project for which I could make maximum use of the time available and for which I could best use my own abilities. I set out to find as many species as possible in Johnson County in one year.

My first step in planning was to divide potential species into four categories and then estimate the number of each that I was likely to find: (1) expect to see, most without any special effort (181 species, all of which I should see); (2) good chance to see (35 of 52 species); (3) possible, but unlikely (10 of 46 species); (4) outside possibility (2 of 15 species). My goal was set for 228 species. Next, I plotted my available time against the dates that I could look for the 98 species in categories 2 and 3. This gave me a month-by-month plan for species to look for. In order to add additional intensity to my efforts, I planned for a Big Day each month (two in May) and a week's vacation in May at the peak of migration. After the year began I added an additional goal: to drive all of the roads in the county.

January started out well. On a Big Day, alone, I found 45 species including six owls, six waterfowl, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Harris' Sparrow. During the rest of January and February, I covered about three-fourths of the roads and was rewarded by finding Northern Goshawk, Northern Shrike, and Gray Partridge. The latter species turned out to be present in all quadrants of the county. Intensive efforts to find Common Redpoll failed, but others (Tom Shires, Chuck Fuller) discovered Red and White-winged crossbills near my office in the Medical Laboratories.

March also started out with a bang when I found a Ross' Goose with Greater White-fronted Geese near the Coralville Reservoir dam. Late in the month, high water brought large concentrations of waterfowl including Tundra Swan, American Black Duck, and Greater Scaup. An early Franklin's Gull and Lesser Golden-Plover were a welcome sight, and a large flock of Smith's Longspurs returned to the same field they were in the previous two years.

After a Big Day on 31 March, I went out on the afternoon of 1 April to look for and found Loggerhead Shrike and Brewer's Blackbird, the latter a difficult bird to find in Johnson County. On 7 April, I took a long, dull walk to Sand Point and was rewarded when a Sandhill Crane flew over. On 14 April, I finally flushed a Winter Wren after many hours of searching. On 15 April, my son-in-law's two dogs helped me flush a Le Conte's Sparrow from a grassy field. I usually find the sparrow in late April, but this year I would be birding in Texas at that time. On 16 April, it was raining when I got home from work, but I went out anyway and was rewarded with my first Osprey, American White Pelican, and Cattle Egret. My sister called about a wounded Cooper's Hawk the day before I was to leave for Texas, so after checking it out, I took her to the reservoir where we found 14 American Avocets and to Lake Macbride where we found three Eared Grebes.

May is usually my big birding month, and this year was no exception. I found 192 species in the county during the month. Some of the more unusual ones were

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Western Grebe, Clay-colored Sparrow, Northern Mockingbird (several locations), Ruddy Turnstone, Mississippi Kite, Alder Flycatcher, Connecticut Warbler, Prairie Warbler, and Peregrine Falcon. By the end of May, my year's list for Johnson County stood at 234 species, 6 more than my original goal. I set a new goal of 240 and reset my time priorities for the species that remained.

Summer is usually slow for new species, and I have less birding time. I added no new species in either June or July and only one in August, Little Blue Heron on the first. Water levels, which had been at flood levels in June and July, began to fall in August, leading to excellent fall habitat for shorebirds and herons.

Birding picked up in September, which turned out to be spectacular even though I took an 8-day birding trip to Newfoundland. Francis Moore and I found 104 species on 1 September, including Sanderling, which was new for the year. On the 2nd, when a passing car disturbed my shorebird watching, I noticed warblers moving in the roadside bushes. The first one in my binocular was a Black-throated Blue Warbler, only my second one for the state (another was in my yard later in the month). Encouraged by the warbler movement, I went to Oakland Cemetery to look in the conifers for Cape May Warbler. Just as I was about to leave, I found two of them when I stopped to look at a flock of Chipping Sparrows. Later that same day, Jim Fuller reported Buff-breasted Sandpiper, which I was able to find the next morning. On the 8th, I added Snowy Egret, Red-necked Phalarope, and American Bittern at the Coralville Reservoir; a Merlin was there early the next morning. On the 22nd, I finally found my first American Pipit. One afternoon Jim Fuller suggested that we look for Sharp-tailed Sparrow. I picked the spot that seemed most likely and sure enough, it was there along with my two missing sure-fire species (Virginia Rail and Sedge Wren) as a bonus. Twelve new species for September brought my total to 246. Was 250 possible?

In October I had planned to look for rare diving ducks at the end of the month, but the warm weather delayed the migration to November. The excellent water conditions at the Coralville Reservoir, however, produced the most spectacular finds of the year. After a Big Day on the 13th, which included a Western Sandpiper, I went out on the 14th to look over the Pectoral Sandpipers with the remote hope of finding a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Much to my surprise, I found a likely candidate and confirmed the field marks after it flew to a nearby pond. Fortunately, it was relocated late in the day and seen by many people. On the 27th, I listened to the second half of the Iowa football game while watching gulls at Babcock Access. I was about to leave when I saw a first-year gull that I thought would be my first Herring Gull of the fall, but repeated study over the next two hours convinced me that it was a first-year California Gull, a species that I had been able to study the week before in California. The bird was seen by many the next day. I was now at 250 for the year.

The first weekend in November produced one of the most spectacular fall fronts that I can remember. On Friday the 2nd, Dick Tetrault and I did a Big Day and found 10 shorebird, 10 sparrow, and 12 waterfowl species, the later heralding the first big influx of the fall. The front was stalled on Saturday with more waterfowl present. I anticipated Sunday would be better. The morning started out unexpectedly with a Red-throated Loon at the Coralville Lake dam area, and an hour later I found three White-winged Scoters at Mehaffey Bridge. The thousands of scaup were accompanied by many mergansers of all three species and all of the other common waterfowl. Even more impressive to me were 210 Common Loons in one sweep of the scope at Jolly Roger. This day also produced my luckiest bird of the year. Late in the afternoon, I was trying to relocate the Red-throated Loon for Ann Johnson and Beth

Brown, when Jim Scheib came by and told us of a Varied Thrush found by Jim Fuller at the Macbride Nature Recreation Area. After driving around and re-evaluating the directions we had, I flushed the bird off the road, but it soon flew and was not seen again. Although the rest of November had nice weather, and I searched intensively, the only other new bird for the year was Snow Bunting.

In December I continued searching for a few missing species, but was only able to add Glaucous Gull, a bird that I found at Babcock Access by watching the gull flock for several hours. That brought my year's total for Johnson County to 255 species, 27 more than I had predicted. I finished the month driving the remaining roads that I had missed.

For the year, I found all of the 181 species that I had listed as expected. More surprising was my finding 49 of 52 species that I had listed as good possibilities. These are birds that I do not encounter every year, but with intensive effort and good water conditions I was able to find almost all of them. Among the possible, but unlikely species I found 19 of 46. As predicted, I got 2 of 15 outside possibilities (Varied Thrush, Prairie Warbler), but also added four accidental species that I had not listed (Mississippi Kite, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, California Gull, and Red-throated Loon).

There were 30 species that I saw only once (or the same bird over 1 to 3 days). Eight of these were found during my many trips (sometimes two or three in one day) to Babcock Access and would have been missed without persistent coverage. Several of these single sightings occurred when I made an attempt to overcome negative thinking. "There is nothing at Sand Point and it is a long walk" (Sandhill Crane). "Sandy Beach is a long drive and it is almost supper time" (Western Grebe). "I have not seen anything at Macbride lately" (Eared Grebe). Other sightings were due to a strong hunch and previous experience: White-winged Scoter with first big influx of diving ducks, Alder Flycatcher and Connecticut Warbler in Hickory Hill Park in late May, Cape May Warbler in conifers in fall. Some, but relatively few species were found by others (both crossbills, Prairie Warbler, Varied Thrush).

I was lucky to have an excellent year for shorebird and waterfowl habitat and good waves of warblers in both spring and fall. The year was only average for winter finches and rare waterfowl. I covered several large wooded tracts in an effort to find several species known to nest in wooded areas near Johnson County (Amana Woods and Palisades-Kepler State Park), but I could not find Acadian Flycatcher, Worm-eating Warbler, and Hooded Warbler and had only single sightings of Cerulean Warbler and Louisiana Waterthrush. My biggest miss was Yellow-breasted Chat, a bird often found in Hickory Hill Park. A pair was found at William's Prairie by Jim Fuller, but when I got there they were gone.

The biggest side effect of my Big Year in Johnson County, besides having a lot of fun in a relaxed atmosphere, was creating some new lists. I reviewed all my daily field lists back to 1949 and my father's notes (F. W. Kent kept a birding diary from 1949 to 1973) in order to create my county list, my list of early and late dates for Iowa, and my newly created monthly lists for Iowa. In Johnson County in 1990, I added two species to my state list (Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, California Gull). Five of 7 new species for my Johnson County list appear to be first records for the county (Red-throated Loon, Ross' Goose, Mississippi Kite, California Gull, and Varied Thrush). I saw 44 birds in months that I had not seen them before in Iowa. Personally for the state, I had 9 new early and 19 new late spring dates; 18 new early and 30 new late fall dates; and 24 new first calendar and 44 last calendar dates. Record early or late dates for the state included 3 first, 6 second, and 1 third.

County birding can be a lot of fun. Time can be used efficiently, because distances are not great. I can get to the best birding spots in 5 to 20 minutes. This makes early morning and late evening birding feasible. One of the most satisfying aspects of a county Big Year was that I found almost all of the birds myself. Included were many species I consider rare in the county and four accidental species. Although I have birded Johnson County all of my life, I found some good spots that I was unfamiliar with or had not visited in many years.

Dick Tetrault was my most frequent companion, especially on Big Days. Jim Fuller got me out several afternoons and kept me informed of what others were finding. Carl Bendorf and Francis Moore helped me with Big Days. Ken Lowder (an audiologist) lent me his ear in the deep woods for a couple of important finds. I thank these people and others who I met in the field during the year. My wife Ann was very supportive on the home front. The combination of goal setting and ease of access to local birding spots got me into the field a lot for relaxed, enjoyable birding that produced a number of good finds.

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

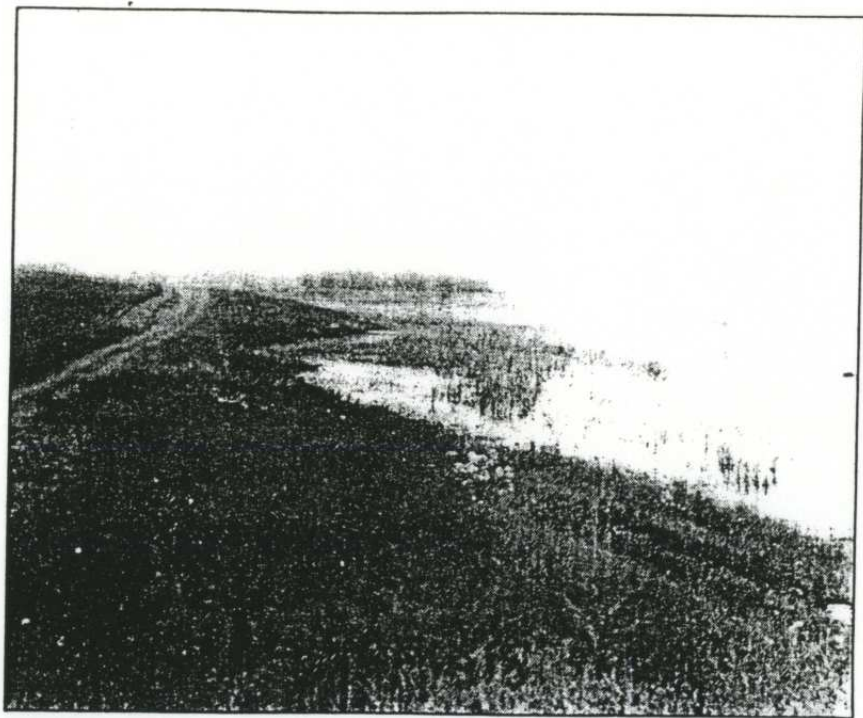


Figure 2. Road along the west side of Little Wall Lake. The road is now Highway 69 and the trees in the background are in the Hamilton County park. Photograph taken in 1916 and currently in photo collection at the Iowa Department of Transportation, Ames.

BIRDING LITTLE WALL AND ANDERSON LAKES AND TEIG'S MARSH

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE AND HANK ZALETTEL

Little Wall and Anderson lakes in Hamilton County and Teig's Marsh in Story County are typical of the prairie pothole habitat that covered central and north-central Iowa before this region was settled. These areas are not home to a great diversity of birds, although more than 230 species have been recorded here in the last 10 years. Some of the better finds include Pacific Loon, Red-necked and Western grebes, Little Blue Heron, ibis species, Oldsquaw, Black Scoter, Common Moorhen, Sandhill Crane, Pine Warbler, and Prothonotary Warbler.

Begin at the intersection of highways 69 and 175 in the center of Jewell (see Figure 1). Drive east on highway 175 for approximately 1.0 mi and turn left (north) on the first gravel road. Continue north on this road for 0.4 mi. Anderson Lake (1), formerly known as Goose Lake, is west of the road. The best viewing is from the

shoulder of the road. This is a 135-acre, privately owned marsh and trespassing is not permitted. Migration is the best time to visit this area. Summer birding is best when water levels are high. Breeding species include Pied-billed Grebe, Least Bittern, Green-backed Heron, American Coot, Marsh Wren, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Sora, Virginia Rail, Ring-necked Duck and Common Moorhen nest here some years. For a better view of the south end of the marsh, return to the railroad tracks located immediately north of Highway 175 (2). You can park along the shoulder of the road and follow the tracks west for approximately 0.2 mi. This is the best place to see migrating waterfowl and herons. American White Pelican and Virginia Rail are seen here occasionally. When water levels are low (usually every 2-3 years), a wide variety of shorebirds may be seen here, including Black-bellied Plover, Hudsonian Godwit, and Wilson's Phalarope. Bell's Vireo may breed in the scrubby areas along the railroad tracks. Winter birding is often very slow, although Short-eared Owl may occasionally

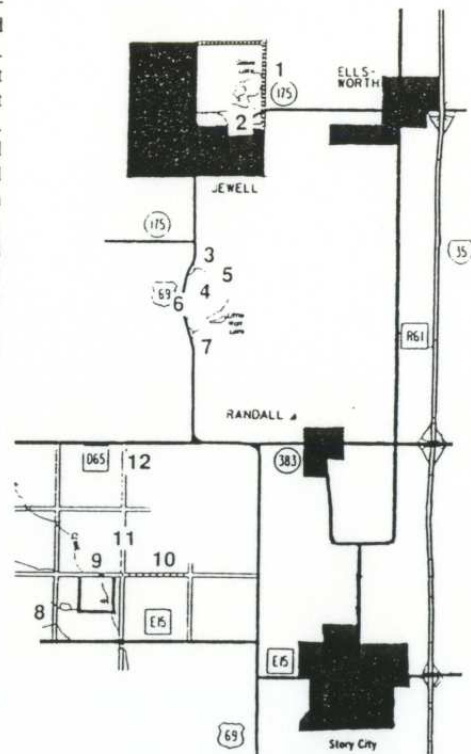


Figure 1. Map of the Little Wall and Anderson lake area. Numbers refer to areas discussed in text.

90-34

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

California Gull, 1 first-winter, 27 October 1990, Babcock Access, Coralville Reservoir, Johnson County, Iowa

Observer: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

Other observers: On 28 October I was with the follow observers who saw the bird: Carl Bendorf, John Cordell, Tim Dwyer, Jim Fuller, James Huntington, Cal and Bernie Knight, Randy Pinkston

Time: 3:15 to 4:55 p.m.; also 7:10-10:30 and 3:00-4:00 on 28 Oct.

Habitat: shallow, open area of reservoir

Description:

At 3:15 I spotted a brown gull in with ring-billed at Babcock. I noted the light-colored bill. Later I saw a flesh-pink bill with small dark black tip. Bird slightly larger than all ring-billeds, but not very much larger. Brown color not as dark as the usual juvenile Herring Gull at this time of year. Rather uniform brown with dark primaries. Light whitish-buff tips to tertials. On sitting bird greater coverts darker with lighter edge. Bird longer than ring-billeds and looked shorter legged. Legs paler (pink) than obvious yellow of ring-billeds. Bird raised wing and I saw a double bar on inner wing formed by greater coverts and secondary bar. All primaries [and their coverts] looked dark blackish-brown [I did not see a window effect]. Same wing features seen on flying bird as it fed in shallow water with ring-billeds (birds alternately swam and flapped over water as they fed in a flock in shallow water). Wide dark tail band with somewhat lighter base [i.e., tail all dark, tail coverts somewhat lighter]. Bill larger [longer, slightly thicker] than ring-billeds but not massive. On sitting bird, scapulars and coverts edged with whitish. Underparts lighter brown.

The above observations were made with a 20x scope at 200-300 yards over a period of an hour. Later the bird landed on a spit at about 100 yards and I was able to get it in a Questar with the bird occupying about one-fourth of the field and made the following additional notes.

Bill long and relatively thin. Lower mandible straight (no bulge). Tip a bit more bulbous, but mostly on the upper part and proximal culmen also curved upward. Tip of bill black but somewhat smudgy. Inner three-fourths of bill flesh pink with some smudgy black in middle of upper mandible. Rather elongated head with feathers extending into bill. Head darker gray around eye and behind eye. Forehead lighter. Eye all dark. Wind blew neck feathers exposing lighter color underneath. Legs very pale pink. Saw double bar on inner wing again through Questar as bird took off.

On October 28 we noticed that the centers of the scapulars were darker than the centers of the lesser and median coverts giving an overall slightly darker appearance to the scapulars. The wing pattern was confirmed and the size of the bird was consistently as described above. The bird was easy to pick out because of its brown color, and when flying the very uniform dark tail and outer wing were conspicuous.

Behavior: resting, flying, and feeding.

Conditions: Distance as above. Sun behind me or slightly to side. Use 20x scope and old Questar at about 50x.

Similar species: First-year Ring-billed Gulls were all in first winter plumage with gray mantle and were much lighter overall. The only other species considered is juvenile Herring Gull. The size is small for Herring Gull. The elongated appearance and short legs fit California Gull. Most young Herrings that I see in early fall have mostly dark bills that are larger than that of this bird. The double inner wing bar and lighter tertial tips fit California Gull. The overall relatively uniform and relatively light brown color without windows in the inner primaries also made this bird look different from Herring Gull.

Agreement: Everyone appeared to agree with observations and identification.

Previous experience: I have seen many California Gull; in fact, I had a chance to study many in this plumage in California just eight days ago.

References/time used: Used NGS Guide during observation. Looked at Grant and Harrison as I was typing.

Time of notes: midway and at end of observation period; typed 2 hours later and some additions made the next day.

What species? CALIFORNIA GULL How many? 1 (FIRST WINTER)

Location? CORALVILLE RESERVOIR - END OF BABCOCK ACCESS ROAD

Type of habitat? SHALLOW WATER AND MUD FLATS

When? date(s): 28 OCTOBER, 1990 time: 7:25 AM to 10:15 AM

Who? your name and address: JIM FULLER, 6 LONGVIEW KNOLL, IOWA CITY

others with you: KENT, PINKSTON, C. THOMPSON, HUNTINGTON, CORDELL

others before or after you: TONY KENT FOUND BIRD PREVIOUS DAY

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 ENTIRE ^{TIME} I WATCHED THE BIRD, IT WAS STANDING IN WATER OR ON A MUD SPIT WITH A LARGE GROUP OF RING-BILLED GULLS. IT WAS NOT ENTIRELY VISIBLE MUCH OF THE TIME, BECAUSE OF OTHER GULLS. IT WAS PREENING OR SLEEPING MOST OF THE TIME, BUT I DID SEE IT RAISE ITS WINGS FOR SEVERAL SECONDS. ONCE. THE GENERAL SIZE WAS VERY CLOSE TO THAT OF THE RING-BILLED, POSSIBLY A LITTLE BIT LARGER. THE BILL, HOWEVER WAS LONGER. THE BIRD GENERALLY WAS A GRAY-BROWN COLOR, LIGHTER ON THE HEAD AND NECK AND DARKER ON BACK AND WINGS. THE BILL WAS TWO-TONED, WITH THE OUTER THIRD TO HALF BEING BLACK AND THE INNER HALF TO TWO-THIRDS BEING PINK. THE HEAD WAS A LIGHT BROWN, WITH WHITER FEATHERING ON THE NAPE AND A DARKER SMUDGE AROUND THE DARK-APPEARING EYE. THE LEGS WERE A LIGHT PINK COLOR. THE SCAPULARS SEEMED TO BE A LITTLE DARKER THAN THE REST OF THE WING, AND HAD QUITE DISTINCT WHITE FEATHER EDGING. THE TAIL WAS ENTIRELY DARK. WHEN THE BIRD RAISED ITS WINGS, I NOTICED A BROAD DARK BAND ON THE TRAILING EDGE OF THE UPPERWING, AND THE TAIL WAS ENTIRELY DARK BROWN OR BLACKISH-BROWN. THE RUMP WAS LIGHTER HOWEVER. I DID NOT SEE THE BIRD FLY.

Similar species and how eliminated: RING-BILLED JUVENILE HAS ALL DARK BILL, ~~HERRING~~ IS GRAYER AND HAS A SUBTERMINAL TAIL BAND. HERRING GULL IS LARGER AND FIRST WINTER BIRD HAS ALL DARK BILL. ALL OTHER FIRST WINTER GULLS OF ANYWHERE NEAR THIS SIZE HAVE ALL DARK BILLS

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:
CLEAR DAY - SUN IN SOUTHEAST - LOOKING STRAIGHT NORTH

LOWA- TSN 4 TELESCOPE USED TO VIEW BIRD 300-400 YARDS AWAY

Previous experience with species and similar ones: NONE WITH FIRST WINTER BIRD

References and persons consulted before writing description: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

How long before field notes made? ^(IN CAR) IMMEDIATE this form completed? 10 HOURS

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

What species? _____ How many? _____ 90-34

Location? _____

Type of habitat? _____

When? date(s): _____ time: _____ to _____

Who? your name and address: _____

others with you: _____

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

THE FOLLOWING DAY (29 OCTOBER) I FOUND THIS SAME BIRD STANDING WITH RING-BILLED'S AND ONLY ABOUT 60-70 YARDS AWAY. AFTER ABOUT 2 MINUTES, IT FLEW AND CAME ALMOST OVERHEAD. FEATURES NOTED IN THIS OBSERVATION:

(1) BESIDES THE DARK BAR ON THE TRAILING EDGE OF THE SECONDARIES, THERE WAS A SECOND LESS CONSPICUOUS DARK BAR, SEPARATED FROM THE FIRST BY A LIGHTER AREA.

(2) THERE WAS DARK BARRING AT THE SIDES OF THE WENT AREA.

(3) THE RUMP HAD SOME MORE DIFFUSE & DINGY BARRING.

(4) THE UNDERWING WAS BROUW, BUT DARKER IN THE PRIMARIES.

Time OBSERVED 12:10 PM (LST) TO 12:15 PM WITH SCOPE AND BINOCULARS
SUNNY DAY

Similar species and how eliminated:

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? _____

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

References and persons consulted before writing description:

How long before field notes made? _____ this form completed? _____

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

90-34
California Gull (Larus californicus), first winter plumage

Date: 28 October 1990

Time: 07:00-11:00. Initially discovered by Tom Kent the evening of 27 October.

Location: Babcock Access Rd., Coralville Reservoir, Johnson Co., Iowa

Habitat: Lakeshore

Description-

General: A very brown gull, it stood out among the gray of many Ring-billed Gulls of various ages. Slightly larger than surrounding Ring-bills, most noticeable on comparison of head sizes and in flight.

Head: Longish in profile with a gentle slope up the forehead over the crown and down the nape. Eye positioned close to the center of the side of the face. Brown overall, paler around base of bill and patch on nape.

Eyes: Not discerned at the distance studied. Tom Kent described them as "all dark" the evening before.

Bill: Proportionately long, black at tip and pinkish at base but not sharply demarcated. Subtleties of bill shape not discernable at distance studied.

Underparts: Mottled brown, lighter than dorsum.

Upperparts: Mottled brown, no gray, darker than venter. Scapulars darkest with very dark brown, perhaps black, mottling.

Wings: Folded wings showed very dark brown, perhaps black, primaries. Greater coverts formed a distinct brown bar (lighter than primaries) with pale tips. Lesser and middle coverts mottled lighter brown. Tertiaries dark brown with pale edgings. Underside of raised wing seen briefly and showed all dark remiges.

Tail: Not seen well enough to comment. Tom Kent described it as all dark brown the evening before.

Legs: Pink.

Flight: Seen once as it flew away from us to the northwest. Very brown, larger than Ring-bills. Pattern on upper wing and tail could not be distinguished.

Voice: None heard.

Behavior: Always in a close crowd of Ring-billed Gulls. Standing with bill tucked into scapulars in shallow water during most of observation time. Occasional preening, wing stretching. Once observed in flight as described above.

Conditions: Clear, calm, temp. mid-30s^oF. Observed looking northward with sun from east from approximately 300 meters (and more as it flew away from us). Studied carefully for over 3 hours at 10-30X with various binoculars and spotting telescopes.

Similar Species: Juvenile Ring-billed Gull is unlikely given the late date. Young of the year should be at least partially in first-winter plumage by late October. First-winter Ring-bills are much grayer overall. Ring-billed also eliminated by our bird's larger size, different head shape and proportionately longer, larger bill. Ring-bills' head with steeper forehead slope peaking at hindcrown, then sloping steeply down nape, eye placed more anteriorly.

First-winter Herring Gull can be eliminated by our bird's small size, slighter two-toned bill, and double dark-bar (greater coverts and secondaries) on trailing edge of wing.

First-winter Lesser Black-backed Gull has all-black bill.

Previous experience: Limited observations of California Gulls along the California coast in March 1979. Many years experience with Ring-billed and Herring Gulls in all plumages.

--Randy Pinkston
526 Reno St.
Iowa City, IA 52245-3039
Ph. (319)351-0592

What species? California Gull How many? 1Location? Coralville Reservoir, Babcock AcresType of habitat? upper reservoir, shallow water, weeds, treesWhen? date(s): 10/28/90 time: _____ to _____Who? your name and address: Carol Thompson 1116 Muscatine P.O. 52240others with you: Rick Hollis, James Huntington, John Cordell, Tom Kentothers before or after you: Jim Fuller,

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.

Medium-sized, immature gull, larger than the Ring-billed Gulls around it. Two-toned bill, black at tip, pale above. All black tail in flight. No gray on mantle, all brown. The head was very dark and stood out from other gulls.

Similar species and how eliminated: Herring by tail pattern, Ring-billed by mantle and bill.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

References and persons consulted before writing description: NOS guide, Seabirds

How long before field notes made? None this form completed? 2 wks

CALIFORNIA GULL

One 1st winter

Coralville Reservoir
Babcock Lake Access
Johnson County

Carl J. Bendorf
845 Cypress Ct.
Iowa City IA 52245

October 28, 1990 3:15 pm to approximately 4:20 pm

Habitat: Upper reaches of Coralville Reservoir, extensive mudflats, backwaters, and river bed; little vegetation except for dead trees. This area is a traditional gathering place for waterfowl and gulls during migration when water levels are right.

Description: Tom Kent and I arrived about 3:05 pm. There were several groups, both large and small, of loafing gulls in view at varying distances. We checked the nearby groups with 10X binoculars and then started on the more distant groups with a 22X scope. At about 3:15 pm, a bird caught my eye because it was relatively uniform brown but about the same size as Ring-billed Gulls. Tom took a look at it and said this appeared to be the same bird he had studied the previous afternoon and again this morning. The bird was resting immediately next to Ring-billed Gulls on a muddy shoreline. The sky was absolutely clear, the wind was very calm, and the afternoon October sun was perfectly at our backs making for almost perfect viewing conditions. At first the bird was partially hidden behind a Ring-billed Gull. After a while, it got up and moved around affording a clear view. It also occasionally preened, stretched its wings, and we even saw it yawn twice. While I watched it in my scope, I dictated the following notes into my recorder. The only change has been in the order and the addition of the remarks in parentheses:

"Initially, it appears to be practically the same size as the Ring-billed Gulls. The head and back are a relatively uniform brown color as is the breast and belly, perhaps the same color as a dark Thayer's Gull (that is, a brownish bird that is mainly lighter brown flecked all over with darker brown). The head is a little larger and flatter on the forehead than the Ring-bills standing next to it. The legs are clearly lightish pink compared to the yellow of the adult Ring-bills. The legs (on the standing bird) appear to be the same size or perhaps shorter than the Ring-billed Gulls. The bill appears to be longer than the Ring-bills and at least as heavy if not heavier and it is definitely lightish pink on 2/3 to 3/4 of the base. What appears to be a dark tip is not very distinct. The eye color cannot be discerned."

"On the folded wing of the sitting bird, there is a dark bar along the bottom of the wing. When the bird stretched out a wing, the primaries and primary coverts were all darker brown than the rest of the wing and there was no window in the primaries. There appears to be a dark smudge just around the eye."

"The bird just flew a short distance. The tail was uniformly darker brown, the tail coverts were lighter and flecked with brown. The belly was lighter and flecked with brown. The wingpits or axillaries seemed to be a little darker on an otherwise light underwing. The primaries or

outer third of the upperwing was completely darker brown. The outer webs of the inner primaries were lighter making for a kind of striped effect. (During a second flight observation) saw very well again the all dark primaries with a lack of any window and the two bars on the wing, one on the back edge (a secondary bar) and one further up (the greater coverts) which was a little lighter, but definitely present."

"When swimming, the bird's head was not taller out of the water than Ring-bills right next to it. However, the bird appeared to be perhaps 15% longer from front to tail tip and perhaps the same proportion larger in body bulk. Thus it appears to be kind of elongated but is not taller than the Ring-bills. (During a second look at it swimming in the water) it appears to be just a shade, maybe 5 or 10% taller than the Ring-bills with about the same appearance of barrel-chestedness as the Ring-bills but kind of elongated."

I have attached a drawing, based on Grant, showing the location of the various features described above. This is not a field sketch and was done the next day as I transcribed the field recording above. The black shading represents the darker brown areas. This sketch was done after looking at photos in Grant and illustration in NGS guide and is not intended as a primary description of my observation.

Discussion:

I already knew upon arrival that this bird had been identified by Kent as a 1st winter California Gull. Based on some reading, I am convinced that this is correct. The two obvious possibilities would be Ring-bill or Herring. Ring-bill is not possible for several reasons. The only possible age Ring-bill would be 1st winter. However, they have only a narrow terminal tail band and already show grey mantle and scapulars.

The only possible Herring Gull age would be juvenile or first winter. They too would usually show a terminal tail band, not an all dark tail and would also show a window in the primaries. The vast majority of Herrings would show a much greater size difference both standing and flying, than this bird did.

All features observed seem to be conclusive for California: Size and shape compared to Ring-bills, bill size and color pattern, leg color and length, and especially wing and tail pattern.

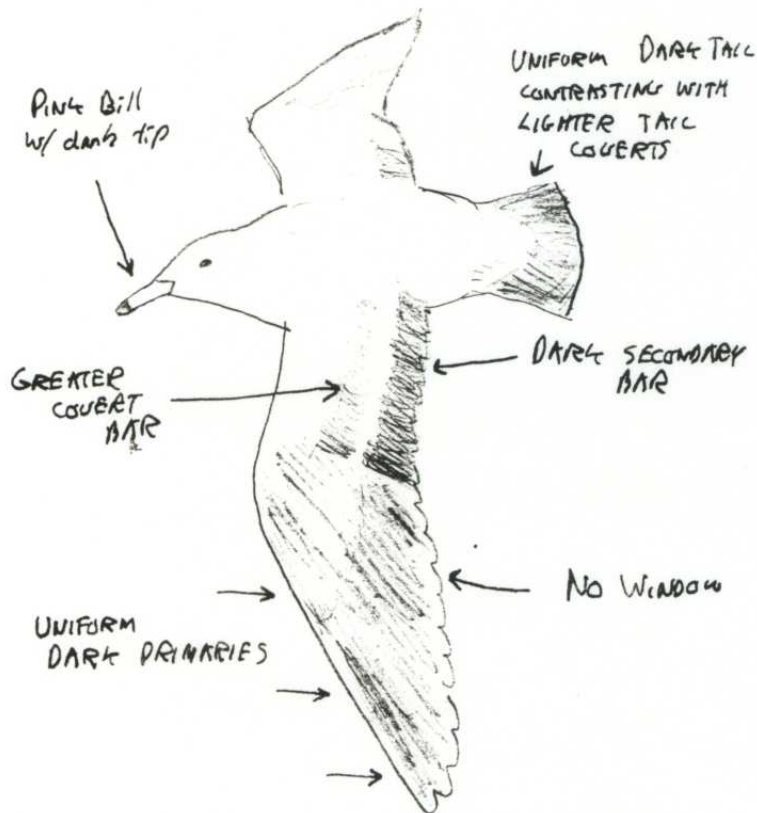
Grant's GULLS, 2nd edition, has a great photo (# 477-478) showing this plumage very nicely. After looking at these, it seems that the feature I described as lighter outer webs of the inner primaries are actually a lighter inner web, but the effect is similar.

Previous Experience: Have seen California Gulls in CA., but never really studied 1st winter like this.

Forms complete: Field notes recorded while watching bird in scope; this form and sketch done the next day.

90-34

90-34



Ca Gull
BENDORF
done 10-29-92