

Lesser Black-backed Gull

10 Mar 1991

Sabula, Jackson Co., IA

\*Jim Fuller

IBL 61:93, 62:71, Fuller and Fuller 1992

Record Number: 91-19  
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, Iowa City, IA 52240

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 61:93

Records Committee: IBL 62:71

Fuller, J. and K. Fuller. 1992. Lesser Black-backed Gull at Sabula. IBL 62:90-91.

VOTE: 7-A-D

A-D, acceptable, good description of mantle, leg color, overall size and bill size and color.

A-D, Good description.

A-D, Good description. Combination of dark mantle, size, and yellow legs sews up this one.

A-D, The bright yellow legs eliminates all other adult dark mantled gulls except Yellow-footed and the European race of Herring Gull. I agree with the documentor that size eliminates them.

A-D, Gull observers should try to see the bird in flight. Try the "wing-raising" technique.

A-D, This bird appears to be a classical example of an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull going into adult summer plumage (attained Jan through May). No doubt about this one from Fuller's description.

A-D, A good documentation with good details.

Dinsmore and Ann Johnson described a similar dark-mantled gull at Keokuk and concluded that it was a Great Black-backed Gull.

In analyzing these various sightings, all agree that the bird was dark-mantled, meaning that the bird could be Great Black-backed, Lesser Black-backed, Slaty-backed, Western, or Yellow-footed gull. The next consideration is whether they represent one or more birds. All of the descriptions indicate a second-winter bird. First-winter birds of these species have a checkered or brownish plumage, secondary bar, no gray/black in the mantle, all black bill, and extensive tail band. Third-winter birds have a minimal tail band, developing mirrors, much less dark in the bill tip, and upper wing and back similar to an adult. Further, this second-winter gull did not look like any of the pictures or drawing in the field guides or reference books. It is a individual with its own features. There are a number of points of similarity in the six documentations: dark tip and light base to bill, white head with light streaking/smudging around eye, black wing tips without mirror, back-scapulars-inner wings brown-black with edging, no secondary bar, no distinctive features on underwing, black tail band, and pink legs (pinkish-yellow in one documentation).

I concluded that all of the sightings were of a second-winter Great Black-backed Gull. The unusual age (only third-year would be less likely) and similar odd features noted in the documentations make it unlikely that more than one bird was observed. It is not uncommon for immature gulls to have very individualistic features, especially when molting. If only one bird were present, how could two of six observers judge the size differently. Peter Grant and Killian Mullarney ("The New Approach to Identification", Peter Grant: Ashford, England, 1989) suggest some answers, which may or may not apply to this situation. They note that the perception of size is usually based on the identification that is made, "It's a Barred Warbler, so it's Barred Warbler sized". If a bird is misidentified, it will automatically look "the right size". Another source of error is that binoculars and telescopes make the farther of two objects look larger than it really is in comparison to the nearer object. Even when gulls are sitting together, judging size is very difficult and not very reliable.

211 Richards Street, Iowa City, IA 52246

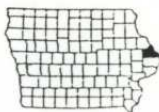
## LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL AT SABULA

JIM AND KAROLE FULLER

On 10 March 1991, while on a weekend outing along the Mississippi River, we were looking over a group of about 200 gulls standing on ice of a partially frozen backwater/harbor at Sabula in Jackson County. A dark mantled adult gull stood out from the rest of the gulls which all had gray upperparts. We obtained excellent looks with the KOWA TSN-4 telescope at about 150 yards with the midafternoon sun at our backs, and identified the bird as an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull in breeding plumage.

The dark bird was slightly larger (maybe 10-15%) than any of the Ring-billed Gulls, and about the same amount smaller than the Herring Gulls. At one time, this bird was in the middle, with a bird of each of the other species on either side five feet away.

The mantle was dark gray (not jet black). The bill was yellow, with a red spot on the lower mandible a third of the way from the tip, and otherwise was proportionately



similar to the bill of the other two species. The head, neck, and underparts were snow white, lacking the neck streaking that winter adults normally exhibit, which may be explained by the late winter date. The legs were bright yellow, like that of the ring-bills. We never did see the bird fly and didn't think to flush it.

All other dark-mantled gulls have pink legs, except Yellow-footed Gull, which has never been seen away from extreme southwest California, and should be noticeably larger than Lesser Black-backed Gull. The European race of Herring Gull has yellow legs, but is larger and gray-mantled.

The first acceptable record for Lesser Black-backed Gull in Iowa was 1-5 December 1984 in Marion County below the Red Rock Reservoir dam (Kent, T. H., and J. Bowles, *Iowa Bird Life* 55:21-22, 1985). There have been more than a dozen sightings since, and with the exception of one May record, all occurred during the late fall and winter.

6 Longview Knoll, NE., Iowa City, IA 52240

## I.O.U. BUSINESS

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Mount Ayr, 11 April 1992, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

Hilda A. Sickels, Secretary

Members present: Ann Barker (presiding), Bob Cecil, Diane Porter, Mark Proescholdt, Rick Hollis, Hilda Sickels.

Others present: Tom Kent, Francis Moore, Jim Fuller, Jim Scheib, Ann Johnson, Beth Brown.

The minutes of the 7 December 1991 board meeting were approved as distributed with one correction (motion by Porter, seconded by Cecil).

#### Reports

Treasurer: Allen distributed a complete financial statement for 1991 including a balance sheet, a statement of support, revenues, expenses, and membership information. Membership increased as a result of responses to the bird feeder survey (1300 participants). New checklists have been printed. It was moved (Sickels, seconded by Hollis) that checklists sell for 20 cents each or 6 for \$1. Motion carried. Tee shirts with the IOU logo have been reordered. It was moved (Cecil, seconded by Hollis) to sell them for \$10. Motion carried.

Records: Annual reports through 1990 have been published in *Iowa Bird Life*. Nearly all 1991 records have been reviewed. The committee is doing a commendable job.

Membership: The committee has considered ways to encourage new members. Suggestions from board members included offering beginning birding workshops and childrens programs. Bob Cecil is arranging a session on fundamentals of birding for the fall meeting.

Publications: The committee will meet at the spring meeting. The annual report for Iowa Bird Life was distributed. Journal expenses for 1991 were very close to budget.

Library-Historical: No report.

Big Day: Ray Cummins has sent out forms for 1992 participants.

Breeding Bird Atlas: Cecil reported that species accounts are being compiled. When map production is completed, the book will be ready for final processing. The committee is looking for ways to subsidize publication costs. Projected price of the book without support is \$60. The board encouraged the committee to continue to explore fundraising ideas.

Education: Hollis indicated that the booklet on birds will be ready for printing by late summer.

Spring Bird Count: No progress report has been submitted from the committee since it was formed in September. The Board reiterated its concern about publication space and costs, compilation time, and the lack of a plan for the project. At the Board's suggestion, the President will dissolve the present committee. A new committee will be appointed to formulate a specific plan for a spring bird count including methods for submitting reports and compiling and publishing the results. Cost estimates should be included in the plan. The North American Migration Count proposal was discussed briefly but no immediate interest in it was evident.

91-19



91-19

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Lesser Black backed gull (Adult)

LOCATION: South Sabula Lakes County Park, Sabula, Jackson County

HABITAT: Mississippi River backwater/harbor

DATE: 10 March, 1991 (2:03-2:27 PM)

OBSERVERS: Jim and Karole Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, RR#6, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240.

DESCRIPTION: The bird was loafing (at times standing, and laying) on ice which was partially covering a backwater/harbor area of the Mississippi River. There were several hundred Herring and Ring billed gulls in the area, but this bird was at the edge of the large group. The viewing distance was approximately 150 yards. At one time, there was a Herring gull about 5 feet to the bird's right, and a Ring billed gull about the same distance on the other side. The bird was picked out from the other gulls because of its dark mantle.

General size was slightly (maybe 10-15%) smaller than any Herring gull, and larger by about the same amount than the Ring billed gulls. This was very noticeable when the three (Ring billed, this bird, and Herring) were lined up about 5 feet apart.

The mantle was dark gray (not black), but much darker than the ring billed or herring gulls. I did not notice any differences in the bill size or shape as compared to that of the other gulls. It was yellow, and had a red spot on the lower mandible about a third of the way in from the tip. The head and neck and underparts were snow white. This bird did not have any of the neck streaking that winter adults, including most of the Herrings, normally exhibit. The late winter date may explain that. The legs were a rather bright yellow color, very similar to that of the Ring billeds. I never did see the bird fly, and didn't think to flush it.

SIMILAR SPECIES: All other adult dark mantled gulls have pink legs, except the Yellow-footed gull which is seen at the Salton Sea, and extreme southwest California. That bird has never been seen away from that area, and should be noticeably larger than a Lesser black backed gull. The European race of the Herring gull has yellow legs, and one has been seen on the east coast the past two winters. That bird should be larger, and does not have a dark mantle.

VIEWING CONDITIONS and OPTICS: The bird was viewed using a KOWA-TSN 4 telescope with a 20-60x zoom lens. It was mid afternoon on a partly sunny day. The bird was straight north at a distance of

about 150 yards. The sun was in the southwest. The viewing conditions were excellent.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen at least one Lesser black backed gull each year since the first state record. This is about seven birds, all of which were adult, except one.

REFERENCES and FIELD NOTES: Field notes were made immediately, and this report was written the evening of the same day, and typed the following day. No field guides were consulted.

OBSERVERS: Jim and Karole Fuller, & Longview Knoll, Rte. 1, City, Iowa, 52240.

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VIEWING CONDITIONS and OPTICS: The bird was viewed using a KONA-TEN 4 telescope with a 30-60x zoom lens. It was mid afternoon on a partly sunny day. The bird was straight north at a distance of