

Black-legged Kittiwake

12 Dec 1981

Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA

*J. Schaufenbuel

Schaufenbuel 1982, IBL 52:25, 27, 42

Record Number: 81-21

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Joe Schaufenbuel

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 25, 27

Schaufenbuel, J. 1982. Black-legged Kittiwake at Saylorville Reservoir. IBL 52:32-33.

Records Committee: IBL 52:42

VOTE: 6 III, 1 abstain

III, II due to multiple observers? Identity seems sure.

III, could be II if doc. by others obs.

1. Size and shape — The bird was crow size or slightly smaller. The head was large and rounded as in other owls but the body seemed more tapered and the tail was long.

2. Color, feather patterns, etc. — The owl had light gray facial discs that were framed in black. The bird had a dark upper breast or throat band with a wider white band just below it. From the white band on down, the breast and belly were light gray covered with fine dark horizontal bars. The back and wings were brown-gray with white spots. The tail was barred. The eyes were yellow and the hooked beak was very pale yellow.

3. Behavior — In flight the Hawk Owl was swift and direct, like an accipiter, with rapid wing beats. It would usually swoop up and land in the very highest part of a tree very much like a shrike. The bird would occasionally jerk its tail up and down in Kestrel fashion. The owl was quite tame and would perch at the tip top of a tree and it usually sat at a slight angle to the branch it was on not perpendicular to it as with most owls.

The bird represents the first Iowa record of the Hawk Owl to be supported by photographs and documentation. The only other Iowa records are unreliable and not supported by data. E. James, 1823, in *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains Performed in the Years 1819, 1820* list the bird among others from this area but has no details. Anderson, 1907, included the Hawk Owl in his book *Birds of Iowa* on the basis of two reports from George H. Berry that he had taken a Hawk Owl in Iowa and observed another in December 1903 near Cedar Rapids, Linn County. No specimen or any other details can be found.

This Hawk Owl was very cooperative always being in the same area so many, and I mean many, birders could find it. I am sure the newly-founded Iowa Birdline was very helpful in spreading word of the sighting. I received calls from birders from as far as Indianapolis, St. Louis, and Kansas City who heard about the bird on the Iowa Birdline and were coming to Iowa to see it.

Literature Cited

- Anderson, R.M. 1907. *The Birds of Iowa*. Proc. Davenport Academy of Sciences, p. 267.
- James, E. 1823. *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains Performed in the Years 1819, 1820*. London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown. p. 371.

GENERAL NOTES



Black-legged Kittiwake at Saylorville Reservoir — While birding the grassy north shore of the Saylorville Dam around 11:00 a.m. on 12 December 1981, I noticed a very different gull flying nearby over the lake.

My first impression was that it was a Sabine's Gull as the wing pattern consisted of dark primaries and a light triangular patch on the trailing half of the wing. The gull seemed trimmer — slimmer and smaller — than the hundreds of Ring-billed Gulls on the lake and larger than the Bonaparte's which were still on the lake. As the gull flew by a moment later, I got a good look at it and quickly began taking notes.

Its bill was slimmer than a Ring-billed's and all black. The underparts were white. The head was white with a small oval spot just below and behind the eyes. It had a bar on its nape. The back from the nape bar to the rump was gray. The wings were gray, lighter on the trailing edge, with a bar extending from the middle of the base to the wrist, which contrasted with the overall color of the wing. The primaries were dark, nearly black. The tail was white, notched, and had a terminal band.

Consulting Robbin's field guide I found that it was not a Sabine's Gull, but a Black-legged Kittiwake in immature plumage.

I contacted Dick Mooney in Des Moines who later joined me along with his wife and Margaret Brooke to observe the bird. We watched the bird for about 45 minutes after which time I birded other parts of the lake. At 3:30 p.m. I returned to the dam to view the bird one last time swimming not more than 100 feet from shore. Other birders were contacted and could not find the bird the next day. JOE SCHAUFENBUEL, St. Lucas.

Black-legged Kittiwake at Dubuque — On 6 Dec, 1981 Russell Hays, Francis Moore, and I were observing a mixed group of Herring and Ring-billed Gulls at Lock and Dam 11 at Dubuque, Iowa, when Russell picked out an odd looking gull. Francis quickly located the bird in his field guide and confirmed that we were indeed looking at an immature Black-legged Kittiwake. The bird was judged to be about the same size as a Ring-billed Gull as we watched it feed with the other gulls. The dark spot behind the eye and the black bar on the nape of the neck were easily noted on the basically white gull. The black wing tips with no white spots and the black slashes running diagonally from the bend in the wings to the back were very distinctive. We also observed the slightly forked tail with a black terminal band. Tom Kent from Iowa City relocated the bird the next day. This sighting represents the fourth Iowa record of the Black-legged Kittiwake to be supported by positive documentation from more than one observer. There are also two other records.

The Kittiwake was viewed in excellent light at distances of 100' to 300' with 7x35 binoculars and a 20x scope. BOB MYERS, 1236 Sylvania Ave., Waterloo, Iowa.

Final Report of the "One Day Eagle Counts" — For the past three years the National Wildlife Federation's Raptor Information Center has conducted an annual January National Eagle Count. I still coordinate the Mississippi River count.

With the Raptor Information Center having State coordinators who publish their results, it is no longer necessary for me to publish mine. Each year my accounts have appeared in the *Illinois Audubon Bulletin* and *Iowa Bird Life*. Other articles on eagles might be written for these journals. The reports summary that follows will show the results of four periods of five years each.

year	adults	immatures	not aged	total	percentage of immatures
1977	622	274	30	926	30
1978	977	416	53	1446	30
1979	1077	300	30	1407	22
1980	992	422	5	1419	30
1981	1094	382	35	1511	26
Total	4762	1794	153	6709	27.2

In the above figures which includes all of Illinois, the Mississippi River along Illinois border and along Tennessee and Kentucky, as well as inland in Kentucky. These are the areas I used in my counts. Areas covered each year are fairly consistent. It is not possible to have the exact coverage each year. My counts were mostly designed to show immature total population ratios.

EXTRAORDINARY BIRD
SIGHTING DOCUMENTATION

81-21

#9

Species: Black-legged Kittiwake

Number: 1

Location: Above Saylorville Dam, Polk County, Iowa

Habitat: Mostly open water and grassy shore on north side of dam.

Date: Dec. 12, 1981

Time: 11:30 AM to 4:30 PM

Observer: Joe Schaufenbuel, St. Lucas, Iowa 52166

Other observers: Mr. and Mrs. Dick Mooney, and ~~Margaret~~ Margrette Brooke

Description: A gull about the size of or slightly smaller than a Ring-billed Gull. The bird's bill was slimmer and shorter than that species'. Bill was dark, nearly black over its entire length. Eye was dark. The legs were dark, but were not distinctly seen since the bird held them within its body feathers in flight and were seen briefly on three occasions when the bird alighted or took off from the water's surface. The gull seemed slimmer in the wings and body than a Ring-billed, also. The bird was mostly white, with a small circular dark spot just below and behind the eye on either side of the head. The bird also had a dark bar on its nape. The back color was gray from the neck bar to upper rump. Rump and tail were clean white except for a black terminal bar on its notched tail. The wings had a distinct brownish-black diagonal mark beginning at middle of wings base and extended to bend of wing. The primaries were mostly black. Leading edge of wings was gray. Between diagonal wing bar and trailing edge of wings was light gray. Trailing edge of wing was white.

Similar species and how eliminated: Too large for a Little Gull. Neck bar separated it from a Bonaparte's and Sabine's. Notched tail also was useful in distinguishing it from Bonaparte's.

Did any one else seeing the bird disagree or have reservations about identification: No.

Viewing conditions: Light was good, though there was much cloudiness. Often closely, within 20 yards.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: None with this or Sabine's Gull, Bonaparte's has been seen often.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Field Guide to Birds (Peterson) Birds of N. America (Robbins) others.

How long before field notes made? Taken during This form completed? 1 month, sighting

Joe Schaufenbuel
Jan. 15, 1982