

Ross's Gull
27 Dec 1997

Record Number: 97-61
Classification: A-D

Lake Manawa, Pottawattamie Co., IA
*Padelfords, **Silcock, *Bright, **
IBL 68:61, 86

DOCUMENTATIONS

Babs Padelford/Loren Padelford (27 Dec), 1405 Little John
Road, Bellevue, NE 68006 [*6/9/98]

Ross Silcock (28 Dec), P. O. Box 57, Tabor 51653

Duane E. Bright (28 Dec), 208 Merwood St., Bellevue, NE 68005

Stephen J. Dinsmore (28 Dec), 612 1/2 West Magnolia St., Fort
Collins, CO 80521

Bill Huser/Jerry Probst (30 Dec), 140 Oakmont Dr., South Sioux
City, NE 68776

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 68:61

Records Committee: IBL 68:86

Padelford, L., and B. Padelford. 1998. Iowa Bird Life
68:137-138.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Adult.

A-D, Descriptions suggest that this was not the same bird seen
at Red Rock 2 weeks earlier.

A-D, I heard speculation that this was a different individual
than the one at Red Rock. Do we have anything to substantiate
that?

wander into Iowa with the maximum number of reports placed at 20 in the winter of 1984. But not since 1992, when there was a single report, have crossbills appeared in Iowa during the summer. For sheer numbers, however, the summer of 1996 was unprecedented at any season.

A final sidelight of the Red Crossbill saga involves an amusing story. An unidentified caller to the Iowa Birdline reported finding a crossbill lying on the ground after apparently hitting a window at an Ames shopping mall. After surmising that the bird was only dazed, she placed it in a box and took it home, where she attempted to "straighten its damaged bill", then later released it.

6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, IA 52240

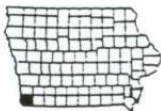
ROSEATE SPOONBILL IN SOUTHWESTERN IOWA

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

At about 7 p.m. on 4 August 1997, I arrived at the Waubonsie Wildlife Area and adjacent flooded areas to look for herons. This area had a large heron and egret roost in 1996, and I was hoping the roost was present again in 1997. After I crossed the Highway 2 bridge over the Missouri River from Nebraska, I noticed a few egrets flying toward a stand of willows near the east end of the flooded area. I quickly checked the flooded areas near the Missouri River, then drove east along Highway 2. About a mile east of the Highway 2 bridge I saw a large number of egrets perched in willows just south of the highway. I pulled off on the shoulder to count the birds coming to the roost. At 7:13 p.m., I was completing my first count of Great Egrets when I noticed a pinkish heron perched in the top of a larger willow, above the egrets. The bird was preening, and I immediately recognized it as a Roseate Spoonbill. I studied the bird until 7:51 p.m. The bird was very distinctive because of the body color and bill shape. The bird was slightly smaller and shorter-legged than a Great Egret. The bill was long, horizontally flattened, and had a spatulate shape. The bill appeared dull green, but when viewed from underneath it sometimes had a flesh-colored, translucent appearance. The head, neck, and body were white except for some brown smudging on the nape. The wings were pink, and when seen in flight the primaries had dusky tips. The tail was also pink. The legs were pinkish with darker knees. In flight, the bird had more rapid wingbeats than a Great Egret and flew with the neck outstretched. On the basis of the mostly white head and neck, and dusky wingtips, I aged the bird as an immature in first-fall plumage.

I returned to the roost on the morning of 5 August with Ross Silcock. At 5:53 a.m., the spoonbill left the roost. We watched it until 6:15 a.m. as it circled the roost and flew north, then turned west, and finally flew south into Nebraska. The bird was last seen coming to the roost on 14 August. To my knowledge all Iowa sightings were at the roost, most often in the evening. The bird was apparently feeding some distance away as it often arrived very late, sometimes an hour or more after the last egrets had arrived. Apparently, the bird was feeding in adjacent Otoe County, Nebraska; observations there on 5 and 14 August (pers. obs.) provided the fourth record for Nebraska.

Roseate Spoonbills are extremely rare vagrants to the Midwest. This is the second record for Iowa. The first record was of an immature on 16 August 1960 at Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge in Kossuth County in north-central Iowa (Burgess, H. H. 1960. Roseate Spoonbill observed at Union Slough. *Iowa Bird Life* 30:67-68).



97-61

I located additional records for Wisconsin (1), Nebraska (3), Missouri (1), and Kansas (3). There are no recent reports for Illinois, Minnesota, or the Dakotas.

612 1/2 West Magnolia Street, Fort Collins, CO 80521

WINTER DICKCISSEL AT BURLINGTON

AARON E. BREES

On 19 January 1998, I made my annual trip to Burlington in search of Eurasian Tree Sparrow. After arriving at the Tama Road area north of town, I located a large mixed flock of birds in the brush lining 115th Street. From a distance, the flock appeared to consist of House Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, American Tree Sparrows, and about 15 Eurasian Tree Sparrows. The birds were feeding on the ground in the ditch as well as flying across the road to a feeder. As I slowly drove by, I noticed a House Sparrow-sized bird with a bright yellow wash on its breast. Not being able to identify it, I turned the car around and got out my camera. As I pulled back up to the brush, the bird hopped up into a tree and sat in full view. The yellow wash was brightest at the top of the breast, fading to white lower down. The throat was white, outlined on each side with a thin dark line. Across the top of the breast was a black bib. The back, tail, and wings of the bird were brown except for the wing coverts which were rusty. As I photographed the bird, it became obvious that I was looking at a male Dickcissel in basic plumage. This is Iowa's fifth winter record of the species, which usually winters from central Mexico to northern South America (*Birds in Iowa*, Kent and Dinsmore, 1996).



509 South West Street, Corydon, IA 50060

ROSS'S GULL IN POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY

LOREN AND BABS PADELFORD

On 27 December 1997, we were driving around Lake Manawa with Jim and Sandy Kovanda, stopping periodically to look for birds on the lake. The lake was mostly frozen except for a narrow opening on the west side. The sun was shining and there was a lot of glare from the ice. We were scanning the lake for gulls when we saw a bird with tern-like buoyant flight. For a few minutes, because of glare and distance, we could not identify the bird. After some study through binoculars and scopes, we determined that the bird was probably a Ross's Gull. As we watched the bird for about 30 minutes, it flew and sat on the ice alternately. About 11:00 a.m. it flew south off the lake and toward the Mid-American ponds. We drove to the ponds but could not relocate it.

We went back to Lake Manawa that afternoon and found the bird again about 3:15 p.m. in much more favorable viewing conditions. The bird was a small gull, the only one on the lake, with short legs and small bill. The only birds on the lake for size comparison were Ruddy Ducks and Common Mergansers. It appeared intermediate in size between the two. In good light, the bird had an obvious pink blush on the breast and belly. The head was small, white, and rounded with no visible markings or collar. The upper wings and mantle were light gray. The wings



were long and pointed with no black markings. When sitting, the wingtips extended beyond the tail. The ventral side of the wings was about two shades darker gray. There was a white trailing edge in the secondaries and inner primaries, visible on both the dorsal and ventral sides of the wings. The white trailing edge was widest where the primaries and secondaries meet and got thinner toward the end of the wing. The tail was entirely white and appeared wedge-shaped when spread.

The bird was very active, either flying from one end of the open water to the other or dipping down to alight momentarily on the ice. When the bird was on the ice it walked with rapid leg movement. It would frequently stop to pick at something on the ice. When on the ice, it looked much like a pigeon in profile and movement. In flight it appeared very tern-like.

We saw the bird again on 28 December 1997 in the same location. It was seen by many observers on 29, 30, and 31 December. The weather was warming those last days of December, and more open water was present on Lake Manawa. It departed the area on the morning of 31 December.

This sighting was the third record of this arctic species for Iowa, the second having been recorded 13 to 18 December 1998 at Red Rocks Reservoir (see note, page 138, this issue).

1405 Little John Road, Bellevue, NE 68005

ROSS'S GULL AT RED ROCK RESERVOIR

JIM SINCLAIR

On 13 December 1997 Rick Trieff and I headed to Marion County for a day of birding the Red Rock Reservoir. We arrived below the dam at 8 a.m. and quickly decided to move downstream from the North Tailwaters Area to the Howell Station campground for a better perspective on the numerous gulls loafing along the north shore of the river. As we were scanning the gulls from our new position, a small pale bird fluttered through my field of view and landed on the shoreline about 60 yards away. Gazing at the bird with the naked eye, my first impression was of a small dove, followed quickly by my exclamation "Ross's Gull!"



The bird remained on the shoreline for a few moments allowing Rick and me a good look. The bird then flew upstream about 50 yards where it landed in the water among some Ring-billed Gulls. We watched the bird for about five minutes as it loafed in the water, at which point the gull took flight and spent the next five minutes patrolling the tailwater area. Our last view of the Ross's Gull came as a Bald Eagle soared across the tailwaters area, sending the bird up and over the dam toward the reservoir proper.

The following description would indicate that this bird was in adult basic plumage. The mantle was a pale gray and the head was white with a small, dark vertical slash behind each eye. The breast and belly had a faint but discernable pink wash. Approximately one half to two thirds the size of the accompanying Ring-billed Gulls, the Ross's Gull's wings were proportionately long and pointed and this, coupled with the wedge-shaped tail, gave the bird a long, tapered look. Dove-like features included a small head, tiny black bill, long tapered body and wings, and very short legs. When patrolling the tailwaters area, the bird's flight was delicate and bouncing, more like a tern than a gull. However, when the gull flew over the dam

after being spooked by the eagle, the flight was fast and direct and resembled that of a pigeon or dove.

After the bird disappeared, Rick and I contacted the birdline and several other birders to insure that word of this find got out. From 13 through 18 December this bird entertained not only Iowans, but numerous people from out of state as well. In an amazing set of circumstances Iowa's third Ross's Gull was found the next week by Loren and Babs Padelford at Lake Manawa (see note, page 137, this issue).

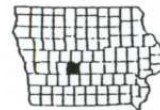
The Ross's Gull is an anomaly in more than one regard. Not only are the shape and color unique, but this species is also characterized by a number of life history mysteries as well. These include where are the Ross's Gulls regular wintering grounds, why are there increasing numbers of records from the lower 48 states, and what is the actual North American breeding range of this species?

810 North B Street, Indianola, IA 50125

A WINTER RECORD OF LE CONTE'S SPARROW

JIM SINCLAIR

On 21 December 1997, while participating in the Saylorville Christmas Bird Count, Rick Trieff and I discovered a Le Conte's Sparrow at Brenton Slough in northeastern Dallas County. The bird was found in a tuft of grass on the edge of a dry pothole. As we approached the bird, it flew a short distance into the marsh vegetation and landed on a weed stem. At this point the bird allowed us to approach within 10 feet and afforded us a leisurely and detailed look.



The feature which first alerted us to the bird was its small size, approximately five inches in length. The flat-headed, small-billed head was dominated by a white crown stripe, a broad orange eyebrow stripe, and a purplish cheek patch. The breast and flanks were a rich buff color with fine streakings extending down the flanks. The mantle was dominated by prominent white feather edgings which gave the bird's back a white striped appearance.

The Le Conte's Sparrow is rare in Iowa in winter with this being only the fourth accepted record. Although rarely found in Iowa in winter, this species' winter range extends into southern Illinois and central Missouri. The fall and early winter of 1997 were exceptionally mild, perhaps contributing to this bird's late Iowa residence.

810 North B Street, Indianola, IA 50125

Babs & Loren Padelford
1405 Little John Rd.
Bellevue, NE 68005

Documentation of **Ross' Gull** in Iowa

Location: Lake Manawa, Pottawattamie County, Iowa

Date: 27 December 1997

Time: 1030-1100 hrs. and 1515-1615 hrs.

The first sighting was from the west side of the lake looking east at the small area of a long sliver of open water running north and south on the west side of the lake. The sun was shining to the south of us and viewing conditions were not ideal. During the afternoon, there was filtered sunlight through high clouds and viewing conditions were better. We observed the bird from the boat landing area, looking west and also from the west shore, looking east.

Description of bird: It was a small gull with short legs and small bill. Since it was the only gull on the lake, the only birds to compare it with were Ruddy Ducks which appeared smaller and a drake Common Merganser which was larger than the gull. The bird had a pink blush on the underparts (the breast and belly) that was visible at all times in the afternoon sighting. The head was small, white and rounded with no visible markings or collar. The upper wings and mantle were a light gray. There was no black on the wing tips. The wings were long and pointed. When sitting, the wingtips extended a little beyond the tail. The ventral side of the wings were about two shades darker gray. There was a white trailing edge on the secondaries and inner primaries, visible on the dorsal and ventral sides. It was widest at the point where the primaries and secondaries meet and got thinner on the outer primaries. The tail was entirely white and appeared to be wedged shaped when the tail was spread.

The bill was short and black. The color of the legs could not be determined, but they appeared to be light. The eye was dark and looked quite large.

When the bird was sitting on the ice it walked around with a fairly rapid leg movement. It looked very pigeon-like. When flying it looked like a tern with a very buoyant flight.

Behavior of bird: The bird was very active. In the afternoon, it constantly flew from one end of the open water to the other, frequently landing and feeding for a few seconds. In the morning, the bird landed on the ice and walked around and appeared to be picking up something from the ice. At 11:00 am it flew high over the trees and appeared to leave the lake and headed south toward the Mid-American ponds. We then went to the ponds and could not relocate the gull. We were surprised to see the gull back at Lake Manawa when we returned later in the afternoon.

Distance from bird: approximately 300 to 500 yards.

Optical equipment: Bausch & Lomb Elite binoculars 10 x 42; Docter 8 x 30 binoculars; Bushnell Spacemaster Spotting Scope 25 x 60.

Other observers: Sandy and Jim Kovanda

This documentation was written on 12-27-97 from notes taken at the time of observation.

We also viewed the Ross' Gull on 12-28-97 from 1000-1100 hours. The Ross' Gull was seen by many other observers on the 29th, 30th and 31st.

Babs Padelford Loren Padelford

DOCUMENTATION OF UNUSUAL BIRD IN IOWA

Species: Ross's Gull

Date: December 28, 1997

Location: L. Manawa, Pottawattamie Co.

Time of Obs: ca 7.30 am to 8.30 am

Time of Documentation: 11.30 am Dec 28

Narrative: Loren Padelford called to tell me he had seen a Ross's Gull at L Manawa late in the afternoon of Dec 27. I arrived there before sunrise the next morning, overcast, luckily, as I was looking eastward over the mostly frozen lake, In the center there was a rather large area of open water with about 75 Common Goldeneyes, a few Common Mergansers, and 2 Ruddy Ducks, as well as a few adult Bald Eagles. Also present was a single small gull, soon identified as a Ross's Gull (see below).

Viewing Conditions: After sunrise (7.49 am) light was excellent, but at about 8.30 the sun broke through the clouds and the bird was backlit. I used 10 X 40 Optolyth binoculars and 25X Balscope SR on Bogen tripod. Distance from bird between 150 yards and 350 yards (estimated). The gull was seen in flight, feeding, and standing on the ice.

Identification: The gull was small; the only size comparison was when it flew over a Ruddy Duck; the gull was roughly the same length, but slimmer. Most noticeable in flight was the dark underwing color, essentially charcoal-colored, as dark as adult Little Gulls I have seen, and darker than the Ross's Gull seen in Nebraska. As striking was the narrow, long, tapered wing shape in flight, rather different from the broader, "rounded-ended" shape of the wings of a Little Gull. The bill was dark and very small, about the same length as the distance from its base to the front of the eye. The upperwings were evenly pale grey with noticeably wide white trailing edges. There was no black coloration discernible in the primaries, the outermost the longest, imparting a falcon-like "pointed-wing" appearance. Also apparent was a strong pinkish hue to the white underparts, especially on the breast. The head and nape were evenly pale grey or whitish, with no black spots, markings, or dark areas discernible. The tail appeared rather long and was immaculate, but I could not see that the central rectrices were longer than the outer rectrices, despite careful study for 15-20 minutes while the bird was in flight. This may have been due to the distance from the bird. At rest the folded primaries were noticeably long, extending past the end of the tail and imparting an attenuated appearance reminiscent of an Iceland Gull's "rear end". When walking purposefully the gait was rapid and pigeon-like. When feeding, the bird looked very much like a tern, "to-ing and fro-ing" up and down no higher than 20 feet, regularly dropping down to pick items from the surface of the water without landing. The long-winged appearance added to the tern-like effect. Between feeding bouts, the bird would return to the start of its "feeding route" by flying directly back at a larger height, over 100 feet.

The only other gull with which this bird might be confused is a winter adult Little Gull. However the flight jizz of this bird was quite unlike that of the 3 Little Gulls I have seen in Iowa and Nebraska; Ross's Gull is tern-like, especially when feeding, whereas Little Gull flies like what it is, a very small gull, with flight more steady than most terns. The diminutive bill and lack of dark markings on the head (no ear-spot or darker cap) also minimize the likelihood that this bird was a Little Gull, as did the strongly attenuated appearance of the rear end when at rest. The Ross's Gull at rest has almost as much bird behind the scapulars as in front, not the case with Little Gull.

Ross SILCOX
P.O. Box 57
TAMAR IA 51653
[Signature]

Duane E Bright
208 Merwood St
Bellevue NE 68005

Documentation of Ross' Gull at Lake Manawa in Pottawattmie
County, Iowa.

Date and time of observation: December 28, 1997, 09:15 - 10:00.

Description: This bird was identified immediately as a species of gull sitting on open water near ice about 100 yards off the western shore. This gull was soon determined to be a Ross' Gull. It had a light, pinkish body wash with a pale gray back and wings, was about the size of a Rock Dove and had a very small black bill. It was the only gull on the lake or in the area at the time. It was soon disturbed by two adult Bald Eagles and it flew about twenty yards towards me and landed on the ice. While in flight the underwings were dark gray. I got a better view of the gull while sitting on the ice. I then could see its orange legs. In a few minutes it took flight and flew north. It stayed low and I was able to follow the bird with my spotting scope. The pinkish coloration, the dark gray underwings with a trailing white edge and a long wedge-shaped tail confirmed this sighting. The bird while flying north suddenly banked and turned around and flew south, again revealing all its significant field marks including long, tern-like wings. The temperature was about 40 degrees and it was mostly sunny. The sun highlighted its field marks. A black collar was not seen.

Behavior: This bird was clearly seen sitting on water, facing north, and simply resting. When apparently disturbed by two Bald Eagles it flew quickly and landed on the ice a short distance from the open water. It rested here until it took flight and flew north in a rather rapid, tern-like fashion. It flew about 300 yards then turned and flew south about 500 yards and landed on open water a great distance away.

Optics used: Bushnell Spacemaster 11 25x spotting scope and Bausch & Lomb 8x36 Custom binoculars.

Other observers: Loren and Babs Padelford and R. Craig Hensley.

This documentation was prepared on December 29, 1997, from memory and notes taken at the time of observation.

Duane E Bright
402-291-6495

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Ross's Gull
 Number: 1 basic adult
 Location: Lake Manawa, Pottawattamie County, IA
 Habitat: small area of open water on lake
 Date: 28 December 1997
 Time: 12:44-1:38 p.m.
 Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 612 1/2 West Magnolia St. Fort Collins, CO 80521
 Others who saw bird: Loren and Babs Padelford, Gordon Brown, m.ob.

Description of bird(s): When we arrived at the lake, we soon located a lone gull foraging along the edge of the open water. The bird also sometimes rested on the edge of the ice and the open water. No other gulls were present. The bird was much smaller than a Common Goldeneye, the only other bird for direct comparison. The flight was very buoyant and tern-like. The black bill was very short and thin. The head was large and dark. The head was white except for a faint auricular mark and some pink color on the nape. The legs appeared bright red. The underparts were white with a bright pink cast. The mantle was also white with a pink cast. The tail was white. In flight, the central rectrices were elongated giving the bird a wedge-shaped tail. In flight, the wing pattern was as follows: upperwings light gray with a broad white trailing edge (broadest at the bend in the wing), underwings dark gray/black (darker than upperwing) with white axillars and wing linings. In general, the wings were very long and narrow with a pointed appearance. I concluded the bird was an adult in basic plumage from the wing and tail patterns.

Similar species and how eliminated: The combination of small size, extensive pink color on the body, bill size, wing pattern, and tail shape eliminates all other larids, especially Little Gull.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with overcast skies. Estimated viewing distance was as close as 150m, but usually 200-400m. I used 10x42 binoculars and a 20-60x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have seen two other Ross's Gulls, both in Nebraska.

References consulted: none

How long before field notes made: written during observation

How long before this form completed: written 30 December 1997

Secondary identification: none

Conditions - light and distance: diffuse light, arising primarily behind us. Approx. 350 M.
 Optics: 10 x 50 Minolta, 10 x 42 B & L binoculars, 30 x 77 Kowa scope (TSN-3)

Previous experience with species: Both have seen an adult in Churchill, MB

Field notes: Nat'l Geo Field Guide

Notes taken: with bird in view Identification made: with bird in view.

Documented: 1/3/98

Stephen J. Dinsmore *Jay Lint*

Documentation

For extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

Species: Ross' Gull

Number: 1 winter adult

Date: 12/30/98

Time: 9:15 & 10:00-10:30

Location: Lake Manawa, Pottawattomie County, IA

Habitat: open water surrounded by ice

Bill Huser 140 Oakmont Drive, South Sioux City, NE 68776

Other observers: Jerry Probst

Other observers before or after me: Loren & Babs Padleford

Description: a white gull, smaller than nearby Ring-billed Gulls, was seen flying, perched, swimming and feeding. The lack of dark coloration, narrow pointed wings and buoyant flight set this bird apart from the two to three Ring-billed Gulls present. Also apparent was a bright white, wedge-shaped tail and upper tail coverts. The underwings were the darkest plumage, being gray with a broad, white trailing edge.

The perched bird showed nearly pure white plumage with a small, black bill and black eye below a rounded crown. Relative to nearby snow, the breast, throat and face exhibited a pale pink color. Posterior to the eye was an indistinct vertical, black smudge, seemingly coinciding with the vertical portion of the Ross' Gull collar in breeding plumage. The legs and feet were a bright orange-red, contrasting sharply with the black bill. The wings extended beyond the tail, and the wing coverts were pale gray in color.

Differentiation from similar species: A majority of the gulls were eliminated based on their larger size and the appearance of some dark plumage. Of the smaller gulls, Franklin's, Laughing, Bonaparte's, Common Black-headed, Little, Black-legged Kittiwake and Sabine's Gulls, in all plumages, have black wing or head markings, usually both. This bird had neither black primaries, even the tips, or dark carpal markings; nor did it have anything but a small, diffuse dark spot marking the head. The orange legs eliminated Ivory Gull and the wedge-shaped tail eliminated *all* other gulls.

Disagreeing identifications: none

Conditions - light and distance: diffuse light, arising primarily behind us. Approx. 350 M.
Optics: 10 x 50 Minolta, 10 x 42 B & L binoculars, 30 x 77 Kowa scope (TSN-3).

Previous Experience with species: Both have seen an adult in Churchill, MB.

References: Nat'l Geo. Field Guide

Notes taken: with bird in view

Identification made: with bird in view.

Documented: 1/8/98