

Ross's Gull

13 Dec 1997

Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA

\*Sinclair, \*Edwards, \*Overton, \*\*\*

P-0579, P-0580, IBL 68:54, 61, 86

Record Number: 97-60

Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Jim Sinclair (13 Dec), 810 N. B St., Indianola [\*6/9/98]

Chris Edwards (13 Dec), 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty 52317

Michael D. Overton (13,17,18 Dec), 1316 S. Duff#93, Ames 50010

Mark Proescholdt (13, 17 Dec), box 65 Liscomb 50148

Thomas H. Kent (14 Dec), 211 Richards St., Iowa City 42246

Jim Fuller (15 Dec), 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

PHOTOGRAPHS

Reid Allen (13 Dec), P-0579

Aaron Brees (15 Dec), P-0580

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 68:54, 61

Records Committee: IBL 68:86

Field Notes 52:204, 1998, P-0579

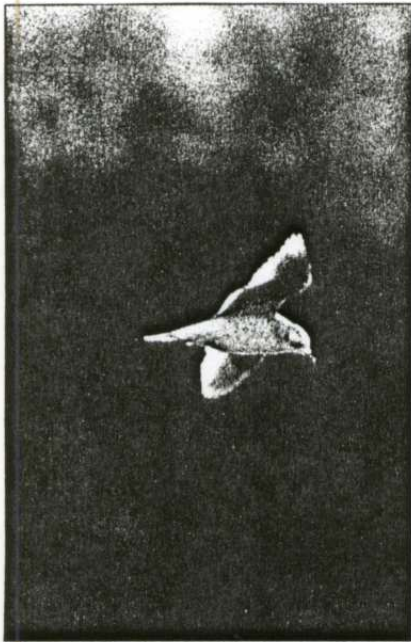
Sinclair, J. 1998. Ross's Gull at Red Rock Reservoir. Iowa  
Bird Life 68:138-139.

VOTE: 7 A-P

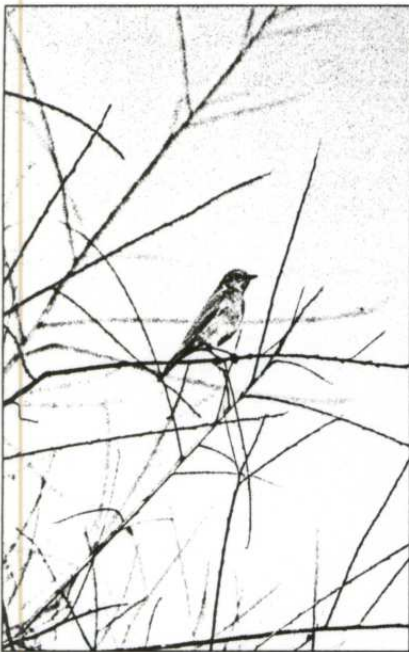
A-P, Adult.

A-P, Wow! Red Rock Reservoir and Newburyport, Massachusetts.

A-P, Lower photo shows pointed tail and both show darker  
underwings and very small bird.



Astoundingly, Iowa had visits by two adult Ross's Gulls this season. This one was at Red Rock Reservoir in the central part of the state on December 13, 1997. Photograph/ Reid I. Allen



A second for Indiana was this Mountain Bluebird at Lake Monroe on January 31, 1998. Photograph/ Alan Bruner

peratures the normal "dead of winter" gull build-up did not occur; however, gull diversity, highlighted by two Ross's Gulls in Iowa, remained high. In addition, a fine contingent of western species graced the Region, with the likes of two Say's Phoebes, a Mountain Bluebird, a Varied Thrush invasion, and a Lark Bunting. Finally, a February road-kill Sooty or Bridled Tern in Indianapolis served to keep the El Niño mystique alive.

**Abbreviations:** H.B.S.P. (*Headlands Beach State Park, OH*); Jax.P. (*Jackson Park on the Chicago lakefront*); L. Cal. (*Lake Calumet, Chicago*); R.E.D.A. (*Riverlands Environmental Demonstration Area, MO*), Spfld. (*Springfield, IL*).

### LOONS THROUGH HERONS

It was a good winter for loons. December Red-throated Loons were reported in Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky; birds in the 2 latter states lingered into January. The most persistent Red-throated lingered at the Port of Indiana and was seen regularly through Feb. 1 (GW, m.ob.). In addition, two Pacific Loons spent most of the winter on L. Monroe, IN; the fall immature remained until Jan. 1 (†DWh, †RHe, m.ob.) and an adult was present from Dec. 19 through Mar. 7 (DWh, J&SH, m.ob.). Grebes were also more numerous than normal, with excellent numbers of Pied-billed across the Region and wintering Eareds in 3 states. The only Red-necked Grebes were at L. Monroe, IN, where two were seen Dec. 4-31 (J&SH, †DWh, ph.). Single W. Grebes appeared at W. Okoboji, IA, Dec. 12-13 (ET, LS) and Jan. 9 at Jax.P. (PC). Clark's Grebes were discovered at Carlyle L., IL, Dec. 2 (†KL) and at Diamond L. Park, IA, Dec. 13-14 (RA, †PA, ph. †m.ob.).

American White Pelicans were recorded in every state except Ohio; the peak count was 55 at Chautauqua N.W.R., IL, Dec. 5 (R&SB). Taking advantage of the mild season, an Am. Bittern wintered at Cuyahoga Valley W.M.A. (P. Motz, *vide* LRo). Great Egrets were widespread, with reports from all the n. states except Iowa. The northernmost mid-winter record consisted of three at Sandusky Bay, OH, Jan. 25 (TB). Black-crowned Night-Heron reports included three in Hammond, IN, Dec. 27 (JB et al.) and a remarkable 17 in Toledo, OH, Jan. 25 (TB).

### WATERFOWL

Winter period Tundra Swans appeared in every state; records in s. reaches of the Region included one at Green R., KY, Jan.

16 (DR) and five at Mingo N.W.R., MO, Feb. 1 (SDk). Peak counts among the flourishing Greater White-fronted Goose population included 1000+ at Reelfoot N.W.R., KY, Feb. 19 (BPB), 635 at Carlyle L., IL, Dec. 22 (KMc), and 600 at Spfld. Feb. 5 (DBo). The burgeoning Snow Goose population was also well represented, with reports from all 6 states and a record count of 220,000 at Swan Lake N.W.R., MO, Jan. 29 (BO). Ross's Geese were also plentiful, with reports from every state except Indiana and Ohio; highlights included a peak count of nine at the Long Pt. Unit of Reelfoot Lake N.W.R., KY, Feb. 25 (BPB) and a possible blue morph at Spfld. Jan. 26 (†DBo).

Open water allowed many dabblers to winter well n. of their normal range, resulting in the observation of virtually all puddle duck species in all 6 states. Bay ducks were also widespread; notable counts included 30,000 Canvasbacks at Montrose, IA, Dec. 22 (SDm) and 300 Greater Scaup on L. Barkley, KY, Feb. 24 (DR). An ad. female King Eider appeared briefly at Buffington Harbor, IN, Jan. 17 (RHu, †JcD, JO, †JMc, †m.ob.). The season's only Harlequin Ducks were seen on s. L. Michigan, where at least one male, one female, and an imm. male were noted along the Chicago and Indiana lakefronts. Small numbers of Oldsquaw and all 3 scoter sp. were scattered across the Region. An ad. male Barrow's Goldeneye was seen at the Chicago Botanic Garden Feb. 21 (†WR, AW). Common Merganser numbers were down on L. Michigan, but excellent inland counts were logged at Red Rock Res., IA, Dec. 30, where up to 7000 were counted (SDm); on Truman L., MO, where 2500 were estimated Jan. 19 (MR); in LaSalle, IL, where 2000 were found Jan. 11 (C&JM); and in Grundy, IL, where 2000 were present Dec. 27 (JMi).

### VULTURES TO SHOREBIRDS

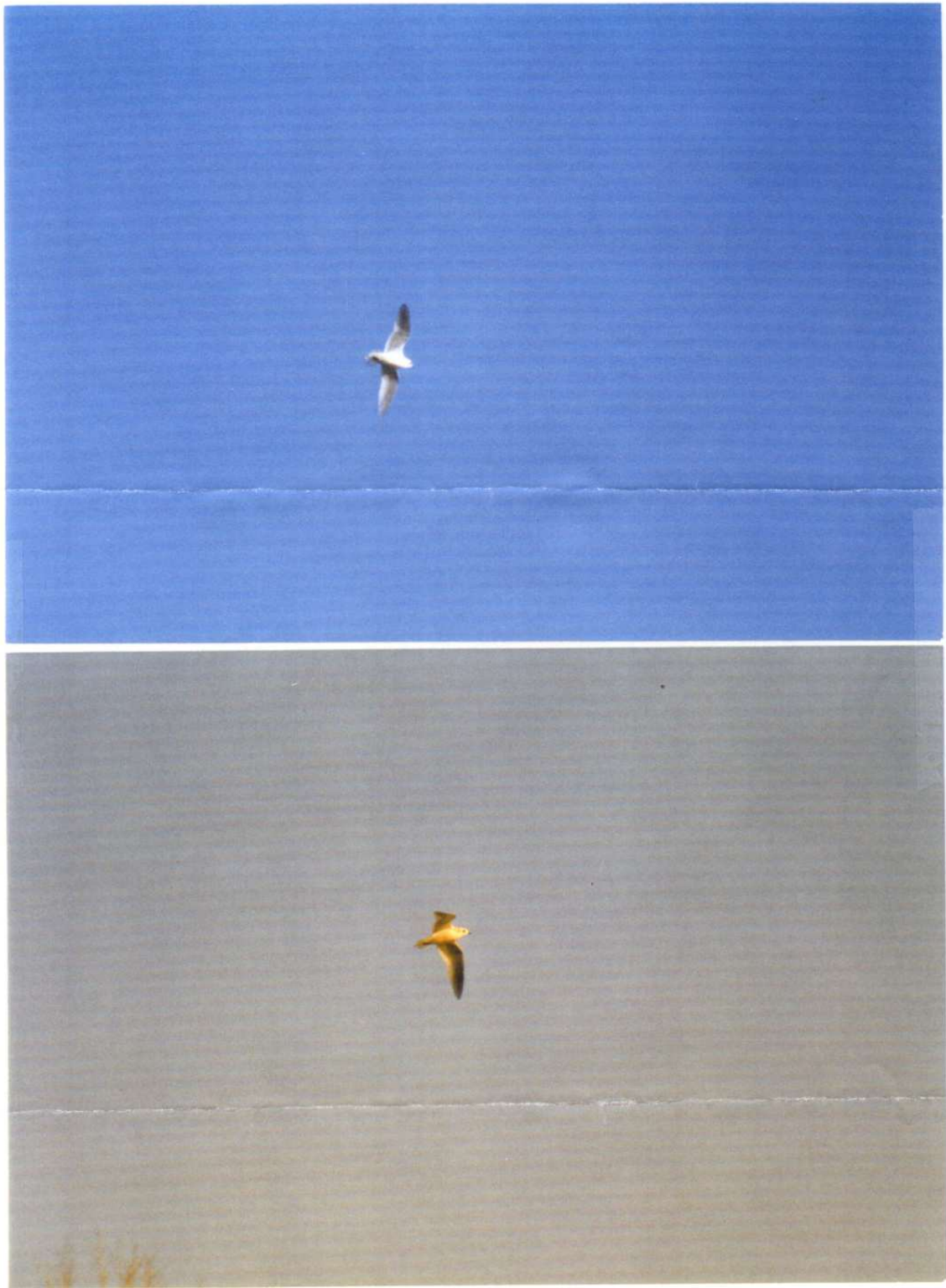
The balmy winter enticed Turkey Vultures to wander farther north than usual. Representative of this pattern were three birds seen at Red Haw S.P., IA, Feb. 4 (D. Garner, *vide* BE). Peak Bald Eagle counts included 2009 in Missouri's statewide mid-winter survey Jan. 5-9 (*vide* JWi); 380 at Savanna Army Depot, IL, no date given (AA et al.); 156 at Red Rock Res., IA, Jan. 16 (ABe); and 112 on Indiana's mid-winter survey (JCs). It was a fine season for N. Harriers, with counts of 37 at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, IL, Feb. 22 (JWa); 35 in Seneca, OH, Jan. 25 (TB); and 20-30 over grasslands of the Ayrshire mine, IN, Dec.





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Ross's Gull 97-60 P-0579  
Red Rock Res., Marion Co., IA  
13 Dec 1997 Reid I. Allen



Ross's Gull  
P-0580

97-60



statewide where there are isolated pairs of Mute Swans (some of them free-flying), but I have a hard time considering any of them to be wild and countable. A single Mute Swan at Mason City was likewise not included in the species total. Other species that were reported with insufficient documentation included Blue-winged Teal and Eastern Meadowlark at Princeton-Comanche, Turkey Vulture and Eastern Phoebe at Lost Nation, and Lincoln's Sparrow at Cedar Rapids. Single Trumpeter Swans at Lost Nation and Spirit Lake were from recent reintroductions and are not yet established and countable. Some species for which details would normally be required (Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and White-winged Crossbill) were widely reported this year. I accepted virtually all of these reports, even those with minimal detail. Normally, count week birds are not worth mentioning, but this year there was an exception. Iowa had the distinction of having two count week Ross's Gulls, one at Red Rock Reservoir and one at Omaha.

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



Ross's Gull, Red Rock Lake, Marion Co., 13 December 1997. Photo by Reid Allen.

97-60

## FIELD REPORTS--WINTER 1997-98

ROBERT I. CECIL

### WEATHER

State Climatologist Harry Hillaker managed to make it through three months of Iowa weather summaries without mentioning *El Nino*, but few writers are so gifted. Barely a newscast went by without mentioning its dramatic impacts throughout the world. For Iowa, the effect was of unseasonal warmth, a pleasant contrast to the frigid winter of 1996-97. February was almost balmy, averaging 11.6 degrees above normal and making it the fourth warmest February among 126 years of records. January averaged 5.8 degrees above normal, the 25th warmest on record, and December averaged 4.7 degrees above normal, the 33rd warmest. Sibley in northwestern Iowa recorded the coldest temperature for the period with -17 on 13 January, while in extreme southeastern Iowa there were no belowzero temperatures. Precipitation averages were closer to normal except for February, which was the 13th wettest among 126 years of records. Overall, the season ranked as the sixth warmest and the 39th wettest on record.



### GENERAL TRENDS

As might be expected, the mild winter produced a number of late departing birds and early returning ones. Most noteworthy of the lingering birds were Western Grebe, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Virginia Rail, Sandhill Crane, Franklin's Gull, Marsh Wren, Savannah Sparrow, Le Conte's Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Baltimore Oriole. The most inexplicable mid-winter record was a Summer Tanager in Iowa City. Some of the semi-hardy species were well represented, including Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher, and Yellow-rumped Warbler--possibly the most ever reported for this increasingly common winter species. The warm February lured many migrants into making an early return to the state. Most waterfowl were present by the third week in February, and many observers noted returning flocks of icterids. Several late February Turkey Vultures were noted. One wonders how they fared during the early March blizzard and sub-zero temperatures. Interesting was a report of a Dunlin on 25 February. This species sometimes lingers into early winter; could the mild weather have enticed it into wintering? According to *Field Notes* Regional Editor Ken Brock, there were other winter records of this species from the Middlewestern Prairie Region.

The most reported species of the season was White-winged Crossbill. I received 50 reports of the species, and it was found on nine CBCs. It was a lackluster year for the other winter finches, with only Common Redpoll found in above-average numbers.

### UNUSUAL SPECIES

Accidental species reported included Clark's Grebe, Mew Gull, Ross's Gull, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Common Raven, and Sprague's Pipit. The Common Raven



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.

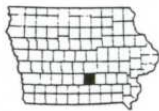
This sighting was the third record of this arctic species for Iowa, the second having been recorded 13 to 18 December 1998 at Red Rocks Reservoir (see note, page 138, this issue).

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).

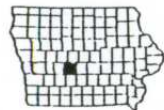
The Ross's Gull is an anomaly in more than one regard. Not only are the shape and color unique, but this species is also characterized by a number of life history mysteries as well. These include where are the Ross's Gulls regular wintering grounds, why are there increasing numbers of records from the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

DOCUMENTATION FORM  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

97-60

What species? Ross' Gull - adult How many? 1

Location? below dam at Red Rock

Type of Habitat? \_\_\_\_\_

When? date(s): Dec 15, 1997 time: 8:15 to 8:25

Who? your name and address: Jim Sinclair, 810 N. B St, Indian

Others with you: Rick Trief

Others before or after you: numerous

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, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

small long tailed, long winged gull  
mantle pale gray  
breast and belly with pale pink wash  
small, short black bill  
tail a distinctive wedge shape  
small, black verticle slash behind eye  
delicate, bouncing flight  
landed briefly on shore line and in the  
water before circling several times and  
then heading up and over to the lake

Similar species; how eliminated:

nothing else really looks like  
a Ross' Gull

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? no

If yes, explain:

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

as close as 50 yds in good light with  
10x42 glasses

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

one previous experience

References and persons consulted before writing description:

AGS Field Guide

How long before field notes made? 20 min this form completed? 12 hours

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).



**DOCUMENTATION FORM**

For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

**Species:** Ross' Gull**Number:** 1, adult basic**Location:** Below Red Rock Dam, Marion Co.**Habitat:** River below dam.**Date and time:** December 13, 1997, 2:50 - 2:55 p.m.**Name and address:** Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317**Others with you:** Chris Caster, Aaron Breese.**Others before or after you:** Jim Sinclair (before), Cal and Bernie Knight (after).**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, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.**

The bird was observed only in flight. In size it was much smaller than the many Ring-billed Gulls present, perhaps the size of a Bonaparte's Gull. It was slender-bodied and appeared to have relatively long, slender wings and a long tail. Its flight was swift and buoyant compared to the larger gulls. The head was white, with a small round black mark behind each eye. The bill was very short, slender, and entirely black. The eye was dark. The underparts were white, and the breast appeared to have a very subtle wash of pink compared to the other gulls. The upperwings and mantle were very light gray, much lighter than the Ring-billed Gulls, and had a very narrow black leading edge. The underwings were slightly darker gray than the upperwings, with a white trailing edge. The tail was entirely white and was diamond- or wedge-shaped, with the central retrices longer than the outer retrices. Leg color was not discernible.

**Similar species eliminated:** Little Gull, the most similar species, does not have a wedge-shaped tail, has much darker underwings, has a dark cap, and has a longer bill.**Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the identification?** No.**Viewing conditions:** 20 - 150 yards away, full sunlight mostly from the side; viewed with 8 x 40 binoculars.**Previous experience with species and similar ones:** No previous experience with this species; have observed one Little Gull.**References and persons consulted before writing description:** *National Geographic* and *Peterson* after notes were made.**How long before field notes made:** Immediately following observation.**How long before this form completed:** Next day.

## IOWA BIRD SIGHTINGS DOCUMENTATION FORM

**Species:** Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*) **How many?** 1 basic adult

**Location:** Marion co., Red Rock Reservoir, Des Moines River Spillway

**Habitat:** Open water off spillway below dam; large manmade lake in mixed hardwood forest, agricultural cropland.

**Date:** 13, 17, 18 December 1997 **Time:** 3:45pm to 4:00pm on the 13th

**Observer:** Michael D. Overton, 1316 S Duff #93, Ames, IA, 50010

**Other Observers:** Dixie Overton, Mark Proescholdt, Ann Johnson, Pam & Reid Allen, Eugene & Eloise Armstrong, and three others I did not know.

**Observers Before and After:** Before: Jim Sinclair After: many observers.

**Description:**

**Size:** Small gull, approx. 1/3rd smaller than nearby Ring-billed Gulls.

**Shape:** Petite, almost tern-like, similar to Bonaparte's Gull.

**Bill:** Black, small, straight, pointed, dove-like.

**Eyes:** Brownish black.

**Head:** Very rounded, white, small blackish auricular spot, blackish crecent below eye. Nape: white with grayish cast.

**Throat:** White, unmarked.

**Back:** Grayish white, darker than head, rump, and tail.

**Rump:** White, unmarked, lighter than back.

**Breast/Belly:** Grayish white, lighter than mantle, darker than tail. Distinct pale rosy blush.

**Wings:** Very pointed. Dorsal: Grayish white, concolorous with back. Narrow black leading edge on P1.

White trailing edge from about P3 to body. Ventral: Dark gray with a broad white trailing edge from about P3 to body.

**Tail:** Wedge shaped, white, unmarked.

**Legs/Feet:** Dull reddish orange.

**Vocalizations:** None.

**Behavior:** Flight very buoyant, tern-like. Would often dangle legs when approaching water.

**Similar species and how eliminated:** Small gulls and terns: Wing shape, dorsal and ventral wing pattern and color, tail shape and pattern, bill shape and color, leg color, head pattern, flight style.

**Did anyone disagree or have reservations about identification?** No.

**Viewing conditions:** High overcast, 20 to 75 yards ( estimate ), Leica 10x42.

**Previous experience with species and similar ones:** Ross's Gull: none. Bonaparte's Gull: numerous sightings. Small terns: numerous sightings.

**References and persons consulted before writing description:** None.

**How long before field notes made?** 15 minutes. **this form completed?** 6 days.



## DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Ross' Gull How many? 1 adultLocation? Below Red Rock Reservoir Dam - (Marion Co.)Type of habitat? Churning and flowing water below damWhen? date(s): Dec. 13, 1997 time: 3:50 p.m. to 4:15 p.m. approx.Who? your name and address: Dec. 17, 1997 2:30 p.m. to 4:15 p.m. approx.  
Mark Praescholdt, Box 65, Liscomb, Iowa 50148others with you: Allens, Armstrongs, Durbing, Knights, Ann Johnson, Hank Zatefelothers before or after you: Alan Miller, Overtens, Jim Sandrock, Curt Nelson, Jan Walter,  
Jim Sinclair and Rick Trief found it; many others

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.

This small gull was flying back and forth over the water and would occasionally dip down to the water. It had a tern-like flight and was very noticeable from the other gulls. It was probably only  $\frac{1}{3}$  the body size and mass of a Ring-Billed Gull. It could be picked out pretty easily in flight from the other gulls.

It had long wings that were pointed at the tips. It had a small black bill and reddish legs. It had a pink coloration on the underside of the body. It had a black dot behind the eye or else it was a portion of a small black line of the collar. It had an all white tail that was somewhat wedged-shaped. The underwings showed areas of dark gray. The upper wings were very light gray. It was beautiful!

Similar species and how eliminated:

No gull quite like this gull. A Little Gull does not have a wedged-shaped tail and has very gray underwings.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

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

Sunny both days; good views; Distances on 13<sup>th</sup> - {closest 10-15 yards }  
 {furthest 30-40 yards }

8X30 Binocs (and 22x Scope on 17<sup>th</sup>) on 17<sup>th</sup> - {50-60 yards away - ditto }

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Have seen 1<sup>st</sup> one in Iowa at Red Rock and ones in Churchill sid

References and persons consulted before writing description:

National Geographic Birds of N. America

How long before field notes made? Dec. 14 - 8:45 p.m. this form completed? Dec. 26, 1997

and  
 Dec. 17, 8:15 p.m.

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

**Species:** Ross's Gull; **Number:** 1 adult

**Location:** Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., Iowa

**Date:** 14 December 1997; **Time:** 8:45 to 9:30 a.m.

**Name and address:** Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

**Others before/with/after:** Found by Jim Sinclair on the 13th. James Huntington, John Cordell, and Rick Hollis were there when I arrived and Jim Sinclair arrived later.

**Habitat and circumstances:** Des Moines River below the Red Rock Reservoir dam—Iowa's premiere gull watching site.

**Description of bird:** The bird was flying over the water most of the time I was there, occasionally landing on the water, and sometimes out of site. It flew over the dam before we left. It was a small gull (perhaps half the size of a Ring-billed) with rather pointed wings. The tail was white. The underparts white with a faint pink cast to the breast. The head was white except for a small amount of black behind the eye (I was not able to delineate the shape of the black). The bill was small and I did not see it well. The upper and lower wing surfaces were light gray. James pointed out the thin black line on the outer primary, and I was able to see this well after a while. The tail was wedge-shaped with the central feathers protruding unevenly. The legs were red.

**Voice:** Not heard.

**Similar species:** No other small gull that could occur in Iowa has a pink breast, wedge-shaped tail, and plain wings.

**Any one have reservations?:** No.

**Light:** Sun behind us; **Distance:** 50 to 300 or more yards; **Optics:** 10x binocular; Zoom scope.

**Previous experience:** I have seen one in Iowa and one at Churchill, Manitoba.

**References before/after viewing:** none.

**Time of notes:** After bird flew over dam; **Final typing:** 1 day.



## DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Ross' Gull (Winter adult)

LOCATION: Red Rock Reservoir Dam (Marion County)

DATE & TIME: 15 December, 1997 (12:45-55 PM), 17 December, 1997 (8:30-9:00 AM & 11:30-50 AM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240

OTHERS: Present at the time of viewing were Chuck and Chris Fuller, Jim Dinsmore, Aaron Breese, Bob Domalgoski, Jerry O'Brien

BACKGROUND: A bird of this species was reported at this location early morning on 13 December by Jim Sinclair. On 15 December, I was looking for the bird below the dam for several hours, when it appeared flying below the dam, and then disappeared up and over the dam ten minutes later. On 17 December, it was present flying below the dam when I arrived, and it later sat on the rocky island for fifteen minutes.

DESCRIPTION: This was a very small gull, only half the size of the Herring Gulls, and two-thirds the size of the Ring-billed Gulls. Upperparts were generally a pale gray, and underparts were white. When walking around on the rocky island, it looked more like a Rock Dove. The head was rounded, with a dark eye, and a black spot behind the eye. The bill was very small and black. The legs were relatively short, and red-orange in color. In flight the upperwing and back were a pale gray. The wing had a white trailing edge, and a very narrow dark leading edge. The tail was white and wedge-shaped. The underwing was pale gray, and also had a white trailing edge. The white underparts showed a faint pinkish wash. The bird showed an airy, bouyant flight.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Winter adult Little Gull shows dark underwing, longer bill, and lacks the wedge-shaped tail. Winter adult Bonaparte's Gull has larger and longer bill, darker mantle, three-toned wing and rounded tail.

OPTICS & VIEWING CONDITIONS: During flight, I watched with Swift Audubon (8.5 X 44) binoculars at distances of 50-600 feet. While the bird was standing and walking around on the island, and at times during flight, I used a KOWA TSN-4 (20-60X zoom) telescope at distances of 100-600 feet. 15 December I was at south tailwaters area mostly looking north at the flying bird on a cloudy day. 17 December I was at Howell Station looking mostly west on a sunny day.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I had seen the previous bird in the state (31 October, 1993) and a bird near Alton, Illinois on 1 January, 1992..

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES: I consulted National Geographic guide and Harrison's Seabirds after the first day's viewing. Field notes made during first day's viewing. This form was typed on 23 December.