

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Printed: 11/20/00

Sabine's Gull

Record Number: 95-55

14 Sep 1995

Classification: A-D

Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA

*S. Dinsmore, *Kent, *Edwards

1-2, to 8 Oct; IBL 66:22, 96; Dinsmore 1996

DOCUMENTATIONS

Stephen J. Dinsmore, 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames 50014 [*3/24/96]

Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty 52317 [3/24/96]

REFERENCES

Dinsmore, S. J. 1996. Sabine's Gulls at Saylorville Reservoir.

IBL 66:112.

Field Reports: IBL 66:22

Records Committee: IBL 66:96

VOTE: 7 A-D

Spirit Lake still had a lot of open water, but cold to the north would change that overnight. I stopped first at Marble Beach but found nothing unusual. I worked around the north shore of the lake without success and pulled into Shore Acres drive to check Trickle Slough and Angler's Bay.

There were no ducks bobbing on the rough water of the bay, but as I turned north I noticed a sandpiper-shaped bird swimming in loose circles in the quiet water along the point. Training the scope on the bird, I saw the dark, stout bill; the receding dark crown extending to the nape of the neck; and the solid, light gray back to distinguish it as a Red Phalarope. It was the first for northwestern Iowa and for me.

I ran back to the truck for my camera and although the phalarope cooperated, the best of the resulting photos was barely adequate as support for my documentation of the bird. The dismal photographic effort also served to reinforce my need to try field sketches.

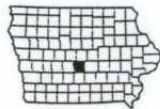
Cold weather froze the water of Angler's Bay that night, and the Red Phalarope could not be relocated the next day. As for me, missing the Oldsquaw just provided a good opportunity for a search on another day.

518 West 4th St., Spencer, IA 51301

SABINE'S GULLS AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

On 14 September 1995, I saw a juvenile Sabine's Gull above the dam of Saylorville Reservoir in Polk County. I watched the bird from 9:40-10:30 a.m. as it rested on the water with a small flock of Ring-billed Gulls and later flew around the south end of the lake. The upperparts, shoulders, back of the neck, and crown were brown. The forehead was white. The bill was black and straight, and much smaller than the bill of a Ring-billed Gull. The eye was dark. In flight, the wing pattern was striking: outer primaries black, secondary coverts brown (same color as mantle), and the remainder of upperwing white. The underwing was pale. The tail was forked with a narrow black terminal band. The legs were dull flesh-colored. I saw two juvenile Sabine's Gulls here on 19 September, and at least one juvenile remained through at least 8 October. This is about the 13th record of a Sabine's Gull in Iowa. The vast majority are juveniles and are seen in September and October. At least five juveniles were seen in Iowa in fall 1995 (*IBL* 66:22).

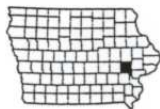


4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames, IA 50014

RUFF AT CORALVILLE RESERVOIR

THOMAS H. KENT

On 21 August 1995, I was at the north end of Half Moon Lake on Greencastle Avenue near the old DuPont Bridge at the Coralville Reservoir in Johnson County when a flock of shorebirds landed on a spit 30 yards in front of me. One was larger. It had bright orange legs and a black smudge across the upper breast. At that point I knew I was looking at a reeve (female Ruff). It was 25 percent larger than Pectoral Sandpipers, and slightly larger and bulkier-bodied than



Killdeer and Lesser Yellowlegs. Shape and posture was most similar to Lesser Yellowlegs. The thin, straight, black bill was about as long as the head. The lower face was pale gray compared to the darker cap and nape. In addition to the smudged black across the breast, there was some fine barring around the throat. The lower breast, belly, and undertail coverts were white. The upper parts were dark due to black feathers, some of which had white or buff fringes at their tips. There were scattered gray feathers in the scapulars. Upon flushing the bird, I observed and photographed a V- or U-shaped white patch on the upper tail that pointed to the tip and had a black center proximally. The wings were plain except for a thin white wing bar. Jim Fuller and Chris Edwards noted that some of the back feathers were ruffled, and they saw chevrons on the sides extending to the legs.

I judged the bird as a female based on size and plumage and the plumage as mostly alternate based on the distribution of black and feather wear. The underparts would have more black in fresh spring plumage. This bird was seen by many birders and remained until at least 26 August. This is the third and earliest fall record of Ruff in Iowa. The others were juveniles east of Tabor in Fremont County from 8 to 12 September 1982 (Silcock 1983) and at Hendrickson Marsh in Story County on 1 and 2 September 1984 (Martsching 1986).

LITERATURE CITED

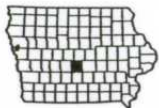
Martsching, P. 1986. Ruff in Story County. *Iowa Bird Life* 86:64.
Silcock, W. R. 1983. A Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) in southwest Iowa. *Iowa Bird Life* 53:87-90.

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

RED PHALAROPES AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

On 19 September 1995 I arrived at Jester Park to look over the extensive mudflats at the north end of Saylorville Reservoir in Polk County. At 2:10 p.m., I noticed a phalarope swimming along the edge of the mudflat near several Killdeer. The bird was nearly as large as the Killdeer, although it was shorter legged. I watched the bird until 2:23 p.m. and noted the following. In general, it was a pale, stocky, plump, short-legged shorebird. The black bill was short, thick, blunt-tipped, and roughly equal to the length of the head. The head was white, except that the crown and back of the neck were black and there was a black spot around each eye. The underparts were entirely white. There was some very faint buffy color on the sides of the neck and shoulder. The mantle and scapulars were light gray with several small black patches. In flight, a clear white stripe extended across the bases of the flight feathers. The tail was dark, and the legs were black. Based on the mantle pattern and buffy color on the neck, I concluded the bird was in first-basic plumage.



On 22 October 1995, I was once again scanning the mudflats at the upper end of the lake when I saw another Red Phalarope. I watched the bird from 9:35-10:15 a.m. Initially, the bird associated with three Sanderlings. The head, neck, underparts, and vent were white except for a black cap and a black spot around each eye that extended posteriorly a short distance, and pale gray color extending up the back of the neck.

95-55

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Sabine's Gull
Number: 1-2 juveniles
Location: Saylorville Res., Polk Co.
Habitat: large lake
Date: 14 September-8 October 1995
Time: 9:40-10:30 a.m.
Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50014
Others who saw bird: m.ob.

Description of bird(s): I was looking at a small flock of Ring-billed Gulls when I noticed a smaller gull resting on the water a short distance away. The upperparts, shoulders, back of the neck, and crown were brown. The forehead was white. The bill was black and straight, and proportionately smaller than the bill of a Ring-billed Gull. The eye was dark. After a few minutes, the bird took flight and worked its way around the south end of the lake over the next half hour. In flight, the wing pattern was striking: outer primaries black, secondary coverts brown (same color as mantle), remainder of upperwing white. The underwing was pale. The tail was forked with a narrow black terminal band. The legs were dull flesh-colored.

Similar species and how eliminated: The distinctive wing pattern eliminates other gull species, especially Black-legged Kittiwake.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with mostly clear skies and the sun behind me. Estimated viewing distance was 200-400m. I used a 20-60x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have seen several Sabine's Gulls in Iowa and North Carolina. I saw a juvenile bird in Johnston just a week prior to this sighting.

References consulted: none

How long before field notes made: written during observation
How long before this form completed: 24 October 1995

95-55

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Sabine's Gull; **Number:** 1 juvenile

Location: Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co., IA.

Date: 27 and 28 September 1995; **Time:** 2:40 to 3:00 p.m. and late morning, respectively.

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

Others before/with/after: Apparently seen before by others, but I did not know this at the time. I was with Tim Schantz on the 28th.

Habitat and circumstances: Expansive mud flats on wide, shallow part of the reservoir at camp site #4 at Jester Park.

Description of bird: I was scanning gulls and shorebirds when I notice a bird that was feeding along mud flats by picking at the surface. It was white below with white forehead and dark brown upper parts. It looked like a shorebird, but all of a sudden it flew and revealed the typical wing pattern of a juvenile Sabine's Gull - black wedge to outer primaries and coverts, brown inner wing, and white trailing triangle. It was much smaller than Franklin's Gulls and appeared to have a small head and bill. Once identified, it was easy to pick this bird out. It stayed alone and fed in the same manner both days. The tail was white with a black tip. I could not judge the tail shape at a distance.

Voice: not heard.

Similar species: The brown back and nape, solid three-colored upper wing, and black tipped tail make this species easy to identify in juvenile plumage.

Any one have reservations?: Tim Schantz reported seeing another bird at Sandpiper Beach earlier in the morning of the 28th and Jim Fuller reported two birds at Jester Park later in the afternoon of the 28th.

Light: sun behind or to the side; **Distance:** several hundred yards; **Optics:** 20x scope.

Previous experience: I have seen several in the Midwest and many on pelagic trips.

References before/after viewing: none.

Time of notes: during first encounter; **Final typing:** 2 days.

95-55

DOCUMENTATION FORM FOR IOWA BIRD SIGHTINGS

Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Avenue, North Liberty, IA 52317

What Species? Sabine's Gull

How many? 1

Location? Saylorville Reservoir (Jester Park), Polk Co.

Type of Habitat? Muddy sandbars in reservoir.

When? October 1, 1995, 3:30 p.m. - 5:15 p.m.

Who? Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317.

Others with you: James Huntington, Chris Caster

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

Details of standing bird:

Much smaller than nearby Ring-billed and Franklin's Gulls. Bill short and black. Eye dark. Crown, hindneck, back and wings brownish-gray, with small white shoulder patch. Brownish-gray of hindneck extended forward on side of face to below the eye. Face and underparts white. Legs dark.

Details of flying bird:

Striking tricolored wing pattern, with large white triangular areas between black end and brownish-gray base. Back brownish-gray. Upper tail white with black terminal band. Underwings white.

The bird spent much time walking back and forth along the shoreline pecking at the ground. It did not associate closely with the many Ring-billed and Franklin's Gulls present. It occasionally flew between different sandbars.

Similar species; how eliminated: No other gull has a similar upperwing pattern.

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

Viewing conditions: Full sunlight, 400 - 1000 yards away. Viewed with 8 x 40 binoculars and 15x - 60x telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: None.

References and persons consulted before writing description: National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America.

How long before field notes made? Three hours.

How long before this form completed? Three hours.

95-55

DOCUMENTATION FORM FOR IOWA BIRD SIGHTINGS

Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Avenue, North Liberty, IA 52317

What Species? Sabine's Gull

How many? 1

Location? Saylorville Reservoir (Jester Park), Polk Co.

Type of Habitat? Muddy sandbars in reservoir.

When? October 1, 1995, 3:30 p.m. - 5:15 p.m.

Who? Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317.

Others with you: James Huntington, Chris Caster

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

Details of standing bird:

Much smaller than nearby Ring-billed and Franklin's Gulls. Bill short and black. Eye dark. Crown, hindneck, back and wings brownish-gray, with small white shoulder patch. Brownish-gray of hindneck extended forward on side of face to below the eye. Face and underparts white. Legs dark.

Details of flying bird:

Striking tricolored wing pattern, with large white triangular areas between black end and brownish-gray base. Back brownish-gray. Upper tail white with black terminal band. Underwings white.

The bird spent much time walking back and forth along the shoreline pecking at the ground. It did not associate closely with the many Ring-billed and Franklin's Gulls present. It occasionally flew between different sandbars.

Similar species; how eliminated: No other gull has a similar upperwing pattern.

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

Viewing conditions: Full sunlight, 400 - 1000 yards away. Viewed with 8 x 40 binoculars and 15x - 60x telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: None.

References and persons consulted before writing description: National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America.

How long before field notes made? Three hours.

How long before this form completed? Three hours.