

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Printed: 11/24/00

Sabine's Gull

9 Oct 1997

Coralville Reservoir, Johnson Co., IA

*Kent, *Fuller, *Edwards

IBL 68:13, 86

Record Number: 97-43

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

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

Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty 52317

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 68:13

Records Committee: IBL 68:86

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Juvenile.

97-43

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

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

Location: Half Moon Lake, Coralville Reservoir, Johnson Co., IA

Date: 9 Oct 1997; **Time:** 10:45 to 10:55 a.m.; 4:55 to 5:05 p.m.

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

Others before/with/after: I found the bird in the morning and saw it with Jim Fuller in the afternoon.

Habitat and circumstances: Old backwater, now without trees and with some mud flats.

Description of bird: One gull was flying over the water, and I thought it would be a Ring-billed until I put my binocular on it. The three-toned upper wing (black outer primaries and coverts, white inner primaries and secondaries, brown mantle) was striking. I followed the bird with my window-mounted telescope and observed the white, slightly forked tail with thin black tip, the brown of the posterior neck and top of head, and light underparts. Although no gulls were present for comparison, this was clearly a small gull. In the afternoon the bird flew closer and lit on the water in front of us. Additional observations included small dark bill, dark eye and legs, brown extending onto sides of neck, white in forehead, mottled pattern to brown areas, and thin white edge to black sub-terminal tail band.

Voice: not heard

Similar species: None. The solid wing pattern with mantle color extending to head and neck eliminates kittiwakes and other small gulls with "M" pattern. This is the first record of this species for Johnson County.

Any one have reservations?: no

Light: sunny, angle variable; **Distance:** as close as 20 yards; **Optics:** 10x binocular, 20x scope

Previous experience: I have seen several juveniles in Iowa and 2 inland adults as well as pelagic birds.

References before/after viewing: none until after typing description above.

Time of notes: 45 min.; **Final typing:** 1 day

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Sabine's Gull (Juvenile)

LOCATION: Half Moon Lake at Hawkeye Wildlife Area (Johnson County)

DATE & TIME: 9 October, 1997 (4:35-4:50 PM)

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

OTHERS: Found by Tom Kent

DESCRIPTION: Tom Kent offered to show me where he had found a bird of this species several hours previously, and as we arrived at the location he pointed out a bird that was sitting on the water 50 yards away. We subsequently watched the bird flying and sitting on the water. This was a very small gull, certainly smaller than a Ring-billed, although there were no other birds to which it could be compared. It was rather dark above and white below. The most notable features when it flew were a three tone upperwing and a forked tail with a dark terminal band. On the water, the upperparts were a soft grayish-brown, which included the side of the head distal to the eye, and the nape. The bill was dainty and black, while the eye was dark. The dark tail tip and primaries could also be seen. In flight, the three toned upperwing was a black outer triangle including the primaries, a white middle triangle including the secondaries, and an inner brownish triangle which was confluent with the brownish back. The underparts were white. The tail was forked and white, except for a narrow black terminal band. The leg color was not seen.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The forked tail alone eliminates all other small first year gulls, except Black-legged Kittiwake. That bird is larger, has a gray back, and has a dark nape line and post auricular spot.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen this bird in juvenile plumage six times previously in Iowa, and also have seen adults twice in Iowa and also in breeding plumage in Alaska.

OPTICS & VIEWING CONDITIONS: It was a sunny day, and the bird was generally to the west. At times it was difficult to see because of the late afternoon sun, but it kept moving, and on occasion flew within 50 feet while we were looking north and northeast. It also sat on the water no more than 50-75 feet away and with a northeast view. The bird was observed both flying and sitting on the water with a KOWA TSN-4 telescope (20-60X).

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES: Field notes were written after return home, and National Geographic guide and Harrison's Seabirds were also viewed at that time. This form was typed on 10 October.

97-43

DOCUMENTATION FORM

For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species: Sabine's Gull (juvenile)

Number: 1

Location: Hawkeye Wildlife Area, Johnson Co.

Habitat: Lake.

Date and time: October 9, 1997, 5:45 - 6:10 p.m.

Name and address: Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317

Others with you: None.

Others before or after you: Tom Kent, Jim Fuller (before).

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.

A small, slender gull with a buoyant, tern-like flight. There were no other gulls present for comparison, but it appeared to be approximately the size of a Bonaparte's Gull.

Details of sitting bird: the bill was black and slender. The eye was dark. The sides of the face behind the eye, as well as the crown, hindneck, mantle, and sides of the upper breast were dark gray-brown. The forehead, lores, throat, foreneck, breast, belly, and undertail coverts were white. The outer primaries were black, several with small white tips, and projected perhaps an inch past the tail.

Details of flying bird: the upperparts had a striking three-toned effect, with black outer primaries, a white wedge in the center of the wing, and dark gray on the inner wing and back. The tail was white with a narrow black terminal band. The underwings appeared mostly whitish with some light gray coloration at the base of the secondaries.

Similar species eliminated: The upperwing pattern in flight is distinctive.

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

Viewing conditions: 40 - 200 yards away, with full sunlight either behind the bird or from the side; viewed with 8 x 40 binoculars and 15x telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have seen one other Sabine's Gull in juvenile plumage.

References and persons consulted before writing description: National Geographic.

How long before field notes made: During observation.

How long before this form completed: One hour.