

Great Black-backed Gull

21 Dec 1986

Bettendorf, Scott Co., IA

\*Sandvick\*Kent\*Fuller\*Bendorf\*Pete\*Moore

22, 23, 24, 25 & ?19 Dec, P-225 Kent; IBL 57:46, 56, 78

Record Number: 86-33

Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Jim Fuller, 23 Dec

Thomas H. Kent, 22 Dec

Carl J. Bendorf, 24 Dec

Peter Petersen, 25 Dec

Francis L. Moore, 19 Dec [? correct]

PHOTOGRAPH

T. H. Kent, 22 Dec, P-0225

REFERENCES

Christmas Bird Count: IBL 57:46

Field Reports: IBL 57:56

Records Committee: IBL 57:78

VOTE: 2-I-P, 1-II, 3-II, 1-no vote

II, I have no doubts.

no vote, ?19 should be 29. A well seen and excellently documented bird.

II, Thank God it wasn't another Thayer's!

I-P, Kent doc. says N. of I74 bridge, should be E. as river runs E-W here. Old sea wall is on Il. side of navigation channel. Bird seen in both states when flying n. of old wall or swimming. Is date correct on Moore obs.--it is the earliest date if so.

II, Description from several observers leaves little doubt about the ID of this winter adult.

II, I'd love to give it a 4 on the grounds it could be a Southern Black-backed Gull, but I imagine you'd all shoot me. Sandvick is new to the documentation game--give him some hints? Needs to explain circumstances and to know that comparative size, not inches, matters. Petersen's documentation so brief it could never stand alone.

REVOTE (at meeting, 30 May 1987, with photos): I-P.

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation

86-33

by the Records Committee

of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: (86-33) Great Black-backed Gull

DATE SEEN: 12-21-86

SITE OF OBSERVATION: Bettendorf, Scott Co.

OBSERVERS: Sandvick, Kent, S. Fuller, Bettendorf, P. Petersen, Moore

DATE OF REVIEW: 5-30-87

METHOD OF REVIEW: Vote

CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: I-P

COMMENTS: No one had any doubts.

The opinions expressed here are based on the information available to the Committee and should not necessarily preclude an alternate interpretation by those who observed the bird firsthand.

Any action may be re-reviewed upon submission of additional evidence.

Explanation of Classification:

- I = labeled, diagnostic specimen, photograph, or recording available for review by the Committee
- II = acceptable sight record documented independently by 3 or more observers
- III = acceptable sight record documented by 1 or 2 observers
- IV = probably correct record, but not beyond doubt
- V = record with insufficient evidence to judge
- VI = probably incorrect identification, escapee, or otherwise unacceptable record

Classification is based on the highest category agreed upon by six of seven committee members.

Lighting of Great Black-backed Gull  
Sunday Dec. 21, 1986 3:35 P.M. 86-33

Place - Ben Suttonworth Parkway  
Miss. River - N. side  
Bill Sandvick, Doris Sandvick  
Carol Rogers.

We all, at once, saw a very large black  
backed gull on a ledge or sand spit. It was  
standing with approx eight Herring  
gulls. It really stood out.

Using a Bausch + Lomb 15-60 scope I  
succeeded to take notes. I then made a  
sketch. It is a side front view,  
as he turned several times. (see sketch)  
(Note) The sun was at <sup>our</sup> backs for perfect  
viewing.

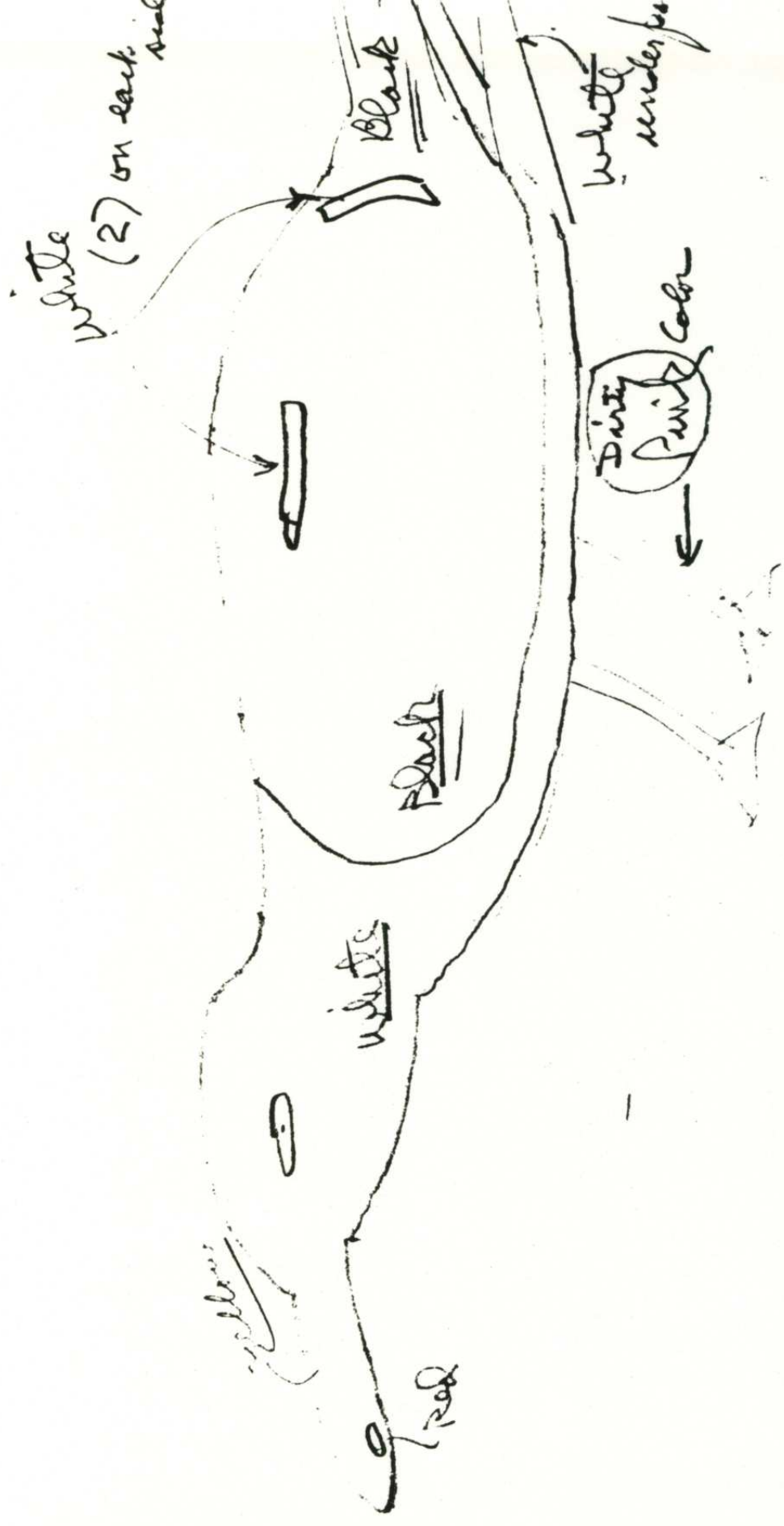
The following was noted

1. Using Robbins & Peterson books comparing  
Herring, Great Black-backed and Lesser  
Black Gull we estimated the size to  
24" - 26".
2. His overall appearance including bill,  
head and body seemed much larger and  
fuller than the Herring gulls.
3. as he did not fly we could not observe  
his upparts of wings & body
4. our viewing range was 20 yards.

We remained until 4:05 P.M. Bill Sandvick

Dec 23. 10:00 AM sight of same bird, obs. for 1 hour  
in flight no perch - NO-Doubt. A Black Backed Gull

24.24"



## DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Great Black-backed Gull, Bettendorf, IA, 22 Dec 1986, 1 ad.

Observer: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52240

Other observers: Tim Dwyer and Al Hahn were there; many before and after.

Time: 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Habitat: center of Mississippi River on old pilings.

Description: "In Moline at a park north of I 74 looking across the Mississippi River. More that half-way across on the Iowa side on a series of boulders are a number of gulls. Sitting on top of a boulder is a gull that looks twice as big as the adjacent Herring Gulls. It is immacuately white underneath, white head, large bill with red dot toward the tip of the lower mandible, legs pale probably pink. The mantle is jet black." ... "Back and wings are black. Feet are pink. The bill marking is quite distinct. The head is all white. Eye appears dark, but can't be sure of iris color." .... "4:30, Never saw the bird fly, but it raised its wing a few times. The under wing is all white except at the tip some dark shows through. The wrists have a white edge. There are small mirrors in the outer primaries."

Conditions: sunny with light mostly behind. Used 20x scope and binocs; bird at about 200 yards; photos with 750 mm Celestron lens and 2x extender.

Similar species: The large size, pure black mantle, and pink feet eliminate other black-backed gulls.

Agreement: yes

Previous experience: have seen many in east.

References/time used: not used.

Time of notes/typed: dictated while watching bird. Typed Dec 30.

What species? GREAT BLACK BACKED GULL How many? 1 ADULTLocation? MISSISSIPPI RIVER, BETTENDORF, IOWA

Type of habitat? \_\_\_\_\_

When? date(s): 23 DEC 1986 time: 7:35 to 7:55 AMWho? your name and address: JIM FULLER, 6 LONGVIEW KNOLL, IOWA CITYothers with you: CAL KNIGHTothers before or after you: TOM KENT + 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.

THE BIRD WAS ONLY SEEN STANDING. IT DID STRETCH ITS WINGS BRIEFLY ONCE. GENERAL SIZE WAS LARGER THAN THE 6 HERRING GULLS NEARBY, SLIGHTLY MORE THAN SOME TO AS MUCH AS 1/3 LARGER THAN OTHERS. THE BACK + WINGS WERE JET BLACK. THE HEAD WAS WHITE WITH NO STREAKING. THE BILL WAS LARGE AND HAD A DARK SPOT ON MANDIBLE CLOSE TO BUT NOT AT TIP. THE LEGS WERE GRAYISH-PINK. BREAST + BELLY WERE WHITE. EYE APPEARED DARK. WHEN BIRD RAISED WINGS, THE UNDERWING WAS LIGHT, EXCEPT FOR ABOUT THE TRAILING 1/3 WHICH WAS GRAYER.

Similar species and how eliminated: YELLOW FOOTED GULL + LESSER BLACK BACKED GULLS - LEGS YELLOW + SIZE. WESTERN GULL - BACK + WING COLOR LIGHTER

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: 20X AND 50X SPOTTING SCOPES. DISTANCE 300 YARDS OR MORE. EARLY MORNING. OVERCAST ~ SLIGHTLY FOGGY

Previous experience with species and similar ones: SEEN ON EAST COAST SEVERAL TIMES.References and persons consulted before writing description: HARRISON + NAT'L GEOGRAPHIC GUIDESHow long before field notes made? IMMEDIATE this form completed? 13 HOURS

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

## BIRD DOCUMENTATION FORM

CARL J. BENDORF  
825 7TH AVENUE  
IOWA CITY IA 52240

SPECIES: **Great Black-backed Gull** NUMBER: 1 adult  
LOCATION: Davenport - Scott Co. (about 1.5 mile upstream from I-74.)  
DATE: 24 December 1986 TIME: 3:25 PM TO 3:50 PM

HABITAT: String of low rocks in middle of Mississippi River. Water practically all open (little ice). Approximately 500 Herring Gulls in immediate vicinity.

DESCRIPTION: At first glance, this bird stuck out like a sore thumb from among the many Herring Gulls. When I first saw it it was sitting facing away from me on a very low rock. There were adult Herrings about 5 feet on either side of this bird. The bird occasionally preened, especially its tail area. It also turned around to face me, and several times it swam in the water in the general vicinity of its original rock perch. Although it was quite near a number of the Herrings, it did not appear to interact with them at all.

As I watched the bird in my scope I noted the following features:

1. Size: In direct comparison to Herring Gull, this bird was approximately 20 to 30% larger in overall body size and bulk. It stood taller, was longer, and proportionately bulkier than the Herrings.
2. Shape: In addition to being larger, this bird had a very heavy barrel chested appearance.
3. Bill: Bill was very large and massive; yellow with a large reddish spot near the tip of the lower mandible.
4. Legs: Definite pinkish, not much different from adult Herrings. Knee joint was proportionately larger than Herrings.
5. Eye: At my distance, the eye appeared dark but this may have been more of a slight darkening of the feathers immediately surrounding the eye.
6. Plumage: Head, neck, and underparts were entirely clear white without any perceptible streaking. Most noticeable was the mantle which was uniformly black. It was not as absolutely jet black as the primaries, but nearly so. The folded primaries showed white spots near their tips. There was also a large white spot in the middle of the back, a little ways down from the top of the center back. The upper tail surface was all white.

During my observation, only once did the gull extend its wings. It was facing me at the time and I could not see the pattern of the wingtips, but did notice a prominent white leading edge to the inner 2/3 of the upper wing surface.

There may be some question about the exact location of this bird--Iowa or Illinois? When I saw the bird it was sitting on a low line of rocks approximately halfway across the River. The best viewing here is from the Illinois shore and this is where I was parked. At times the bird swam around on both sides of this line of rocks. I was not sure where the exact boundary is, so I looked for some guidance. T. Kent's article, "When is a Bird in Iowa?" (Iowa Bird Life Vol 55, pp.79-80, 1985) states that the IOU Records Committee has decided to follow the guidelines of the American Birding Association whereby the location of

a bird is "defined by [a state's] legal boundaries. If not legally defined otherwise, it includes adjacent waters (rivers, lakes, bays, sounds, etc.) out to half the distance to a neighboring area, but not beyond 100 miles". Kent goes on to state that the legal boundary on the eastern part of Iowa is defined in the Iowa Code as "the middle of the main channel of the Mississippi River... Since these river boundaries were defined before navigation channels were made, the main channel can be interpreted as half way across the body of water that comprises the primary channel of the river." Since there are no islands or backwaters in the river at this point, the whole river is the main channel and it sounds to me like the boundary in this case is the middle of the river. When I drove back across the I-74 bridge, I looked upstream at the string of rocks on which the gulls were sitting and it appeared to be about in the middle of the river. So when the Great Black-backed swam around on both sides of the string of rocks it probably didn't know it was guilty of crossing state lines to commit a fowl deed.

#### SIMILAR SPECIES--COMMENTS:

This is my first encounter with this species. I have seen adults of all the other dark-mantled gulls: Western, Yellow-footed, Lesser Black-backed, and Slaty-backed. The first three are normally smaller than Herrings, so it is hard to imagine one to be 20 to 30% larger than a Herring as this bird was. This size factor alone is practically diagnostic when combined with the blackish mantle. The pink legs of this bird eliminates Yellow-footed and Lesser Black-backed. The Slaty-backed could be a little larger than a Herring, but the mantle should not be almost black as was this bird's.

One thing to consider might be a hybrid Herring X Great Black-backed although the mantle color would probably not fit. In "Slaty-backed Gull winters on the Mississippi River" by Goetz, Rudden, and Snetsinger in AMERICAN BIRDS Vol 40, pp. 207-217, the authors state "The mantle color of [Herring X Great Black-backed] is rather variable, but probably not more than one-half shade darker than in the California Gull, hence at least two full shades paler than in [Slaty-backed]."

In summary, all features observed are consistent with Great Black-backed Gull and also eliminate other possibilities.

LIGHT CONDITIONS: Complete uniform grey overcast sky. No shadows.

DISTANCE: 300 Yards. (Estimated) EQUIPMENT: 22X scope, 10X40 binos

#### REFERENCES, PERSONS CONSULTED BEFORE WRITING DESCRIPTION:

As I observed bird, I looked at both Master Field Guide and National Geographic. I made field notes of description during my leisurely observation. Typed this form the next day.



Ross-mydocca5 & Bl-bk-gull several days later. seen by many obs

86-33

Great Black-backed Gull - one - adult

Mississippi River between Molinet & Bettendorf about 1 mi. E. I 74 bridge  
25 Dec. 1986 3:15 to 3:17 P.M. 11 Jan. 4:40-4:50 P.M.

by Peter & Mary Lou Petersen, 235 McClellan Blvd, Davenport, IA 52803  
with us were Bill & Ann Barker & Betty Hunt  
seen previously by Kelly McKay, Gil Sandvick, Lewis, Brian & Corey Blevins,  
Carl Bendorf, T. H. Kent, Tim Dwyer & others.

Large adult gull, head & body white, tail white, mantle dark  
grey, nearly black, with white trailing edge to tip. Bill yellow.

Unlike any other gull except perhaps Western which is smaller and not  
as dark on mantle.

No one disagreed with observational details or I.D.

Overcast, bird about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile away, viewed thru <sup>est.</sup> 10x40 + 7x35 binocs + 50x60  
scope

Had seen species many times in the east.

Had checked Geo. guide prior to sighting to confirm I.D. points

Documentation done 3 hours after observation.

What species? GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL How many? 1 adult

Location? Along Mississippi River North of I-74 bridge in Bettendorf, Scott Co.

Type of habitat? Standing on old rock wall in Mississippi River on Iowa side of river

When? date(s): 19 December 1986 time: 3:25 p.m. to 3:40 p.m.

Who? your name and address: Francis L. Moore, 336 Fairfield St., Waterloo, IA 50703

others with you: None

others before or after you: Pete Petersen, Tom Kent, 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.

I had been watching for this bird for about 2 1/2 hours and had decided it was not going to show up. It had been showing up in mid-to-late afternoon and I figured that it was not going to show up and I had to get back to Waterloo. I decided to watch until 3:30 and then leave. As I made one of my last scans with binoculars I saw a Black-backed Gull standing on one of the sections of cement sticking out of the wall about 3/4 of the way across the river from where I was sitting in Moline, IL. The bird was standing by itself on the section of wall with the closest gull being a Herring Gull about 30 feet away. This gull was much larger and heavier bodied than the Herring Gull. The bill was extremely large and massive. It was yellow with a large red gonyx spot. The eye appeared light colored but I could not be sure due to lighting and distance. The head was large and white with some dark streaking behind the eye. The neck, breast, belly, ~~upper tail and~~ lower tail coverts and tail were all clear white. The bird stretched several times while I watched it and I could see two large white spots on the ~~tip~~ tips of the leading primaries and white tips on the 2<sup>nd</sup> through about the 5<sup>th</sup> primary. The upper surface of the wings and back was a dark charcoal to black color with a white leading and wider trailing edge to the wings. The feet were pink.

Similar species and how eliminated: No other black-backed gull is this large with this massive a bill.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

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

Cloudy, bright overcast, slight mist. Seen from approx. 100-150 yards using 10x40 binoculars, 20x60 telescope and 33x90 telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen ~~lots of~~ lots of Great-Black-backed Gulls on East Coast. Have seen 3 Lesser Black-backed Gulls.

References and persons consulted before writing description: None

How long before field notes made? Time of sighting this form completed? 1 day

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240