

Black-legged Kittiwake

24 Apr 1983

dredge ponds near Lake Manawa, Pottawattamie Co., IA

*William and Rebecca Otto

IBL 54:39

Record Number: 83-07

Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

William/Rebecca Otto

LETTERS

Tanya Bray (submitted with documentation)

Bruce Peterjohn, 21 June 1983 (included with review)

REFERENCE

Records Committee: IBL 54:39

VOTE: 3-IV, 2-V, 2-VI

IV, Ditto, lack of black collar puzzling.

V, Lack of head and neck marks disturbing. Other features difficult to judge without seeing the bird. Were black legs real or apparent?

IV, Description does not eliminate the more likely Bonapartes Gull.

IV, Spring, inland records rare. Black legs are not a concrete mark. Other marks Bonaparte Gull-like.

VI, Description eliminates Kittiwake (bill color--bicolored; head & neck--lacking markings). I have to wonder, however, as B.J. Rose is an experienced observer, whether there may have been a Kittiwake in the area.

V, Lack of crescent on nape is not a problem; 2nd year birds may lack it. Some details (eg undescribed breast spots) questionable for Kittiwake. Good description of field marks known to be useful in identification, but there should be more general description; details of ordinary parts of the plumage. B. J. Rose's sighting at Manawa 24 Apr. suggests a kittiwake was present, despite the documentation. Too bad BJ won't write documentations.

105-K E. Ticonderoga Dr.
Westerville, OH 43081
21 June 1983

Dear Tom:

I'm looking forward to the I.C.U. meeting in October. I'll let you know about my travel plans and provide you with some slides at a later date.

My thoughts on the documentations are as follows:

- Mississippi Kite: definitely a Northern Harrier
- Black-legged Kittiwake: definitely a first-year Ring-billed Gull!
The absence of head and nape markings, bill color and tail shape eliminate the possibility of a kittiwake.
- Laughing Gull: the description does not eliminate a sub-adult Franklin's Gull (which would have a similar wing pattern with no white separating the gray mantle from the black primaries.) Since she did not describe bill and leg color or the black hood in detail, I cannot accurately age this bird (and hence cannot identify it to species). Given its location in extreme western Iowa, I would imagine that a Franklin's would be much more likely.
- Black-headed Grosbeak: another problematical grosbeak sighting that does not sit very well with me. The description of the underparts is suggestive of a Black-head but is not detailed enough to be conclusive (the observer should have mentioned the belly and described the streaking pattern in more detail). The white eye line is suggestive of a Rose-breast. In addition, the observer was not familiar with the species and appeared rather indecisive with her own identification. Given these facts, I don't think this written description provides a conclusive basis for identifying this bird to either species.
- Whooping Crane: I have a number of problems with this sighting. First, the fact the observer was a non-birder who observed the bird at a distance of 100 yards without binoculars makes me wonder about the accuracy of the description (could he accurately determine bill and leg color at that distance?). Secondly, the crane he described was a first-year bird that should still be accompanying its parents (by the way there were only 2 or 3 young produced last year out of the 70 or so cranes in the Aransas flock). Thirdly, it is rather unlikely that this species would be feeding along the shore of a man-made lake. Lastly, I invariably receive 1 or 2 Whooping Crane reports from somewhere in the Region each year (I also received 1 from Indiana this spring). These reports always come from casual or non-birders in very unlikely locations. While it is conceivable that an occasional crane might stray into extreme western Iowa or Missouri, such a sighting must be thoroughly described by a number of active birders (and hopefully accompanied by photos) before I will accept it.

Western Grebe: the description is pretty good for a light-phase bird. The best field mark is the head pattern which he described perfectly (white lores and white extending above the eye). The bill color is a little troublesome; light-phased grebes have orange-yellow bills while dark-phase birds have greenish-yellow bills. However, the description of a "bright yellow" bill is closer to a light-phase bird. Another characteristic that is frequently useful is back color. Light-phase birds have a grayish back that is lighter than the nape (as was accurately described for this bird); dark-phase grebes have uniformly black upperparts and nape. The best article describing these color phases is found in Western Birds (1981, Vol. 12 (1), pp. 41-46); I can send you a copy if you're interested.

Eastern Wood Pewee: very marginal description (so marginal that I probably won't include it in my report). I have problems with any pewee described as a black and white bird (the upperparts certainly aren't black and the underparts aren't uniformly white). In addition, Empidonax flycatchers frequently lack eye rings. Given this brief and inaccurate description and the observers apparent inexperience, I would have to describe this sighting as questionable at best.

Gray-cheeked Thrush: another questionable sighting. The rusty tail of a Hermit can be rather difficult to view (especially for young birds in poor light). They also failed to mention the gray cheek patch. Given their inexperience, this sighting would best be treated as Catharus sp.

Several miscellaneous comments on some observations:

Yellow Rails: while the descriptions seem to come out of a field guide, from my experience, Yellow Rails look nothing like those pictured in the books. For example, they are not yellow at all but have cream-colored underparts and tan or buffy upperparts with rather indistinct dark streaks. If Iowa observers are seeing yellow-colored rails, I do not know what they are looking at.

Long-billed Dowitcher: basic plumaged long-bills cannot be identified by bill length and wing covert edgings!!!! I would suggest Mike Newlon read Pitelka's excellent monograph on the genus Limnodromus (1948, U. California Publ. Zool. 50: 1-108). before he attempts further identifications of dowitchers. While fall juveniles and breeding plumaged adults can be safely identified with caution (don't use the misinformation in the field guides), winter plumaged birds in migration cause real problems. I don't know of any proven field identification techniques for these dowitchers. (This letter is too long already, I will defer further discussion until October). Many birders are having similar problems. This spring, one state in the Region reported more long-bills than short-bills which is preposterous.

Godwits: I totally agree with your comment on godwit identification. Any May sighting of 46 godwits in this Region must certainly be Hudsonians.

then call notes

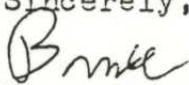
Tom Kent
June 21, 1983
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I have several requests:

1. Can you send me a better copy (or the original) of the Chestnut-collared Longspur documentation? I can't read the copy you sent me.
2. Can you send me a photo of the Vermilion Flycatcher? While a Vermilion Flycatcher should be unmistakable, there was a partially melanistic Scarlet Tanager in New York this spring that had a plumage pattern identical to a Vermilion Flycatcher (and was originally identified as one until someone familiar with both species saw the bird).

I will return both the photo and original ^{longspur documentation} promptly. I will feel more comfortable including both sightings in my spring report if I can study the available evidence in better detail.

I hope this information is useful to you. (I also hope it makes sense; it is getting quite late and I should have gone to bed long ago). Let me know if I can provide further assistance.

Sincerely,

 Bruce Peterjohn

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation
by the Records Committee
of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE
DATE SEEN: 24 April, 1983
SITE OF OBSERVATION: Pottawattamie County
OBSERVERS: William and Rebecca Otto
DATE OF REVIEW: 1983
METHOD OF REVIEW: Mailing to Committee
CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: VI

COMMENTS: The Committee generally agreed that the details provided in fact eliminated Black-legged Kittiwake: 1. Lack of head and neck markings; 2. bicolored bill; 3. black legs not diagnostic, and may have just appeared black. This combination of characters never occur in the Black-legged Kittiwake. Also, the species is rather rare in spring in the interior. Likely alternatives included Ring-billed Gull (most likely due to bicolored bill) or Bonaparte's Gull. Recent field guides have very good information on gull identification (Grant's book; the National Geographic Field Guide- excellent), and it is strongly suggested that Robbins' Birds of North America and Peterson's books not be used for identifying out-of-range gulls.

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.

VI

83-7

Dear Tom,

This documentation was sent to me by

Bill and Becky Otto
5009 Lafayette St
Omaha, Ne 68132

The Kittiwake was also observed by B.J. and Sharon Rose on April 24. B.J. told me he saw a "shadow" of the crescent remaining on the neck. He said it was very faint.

On April 25, BJ and I went to Lake Manawa to try and see the bird, but could not locate it. To my knowledge, it was not seen again.

Tanya Bray

On 23 April 1983, William + Rebecca ⁸³⁻⁰⁷ Otto
observed an immature Black-legged Kittiwake
at the dredge ponds near Lake Manaway
Council Bluffs, Iowa.

The gull was first observed hovering 30'
overhead allowing us an excellent view
of its black legs and feet. The bill was
not of uniform color but dark at the tip
and light at the base. The tail appeared
flush rather than forked or rounded and had
a black terminal band. The head and
belly were white and the chest was white
with a few black spots. The neck
appeared solid white and lacked the black
nape usually apparent on immature individuals
of this species.

The outer primaries were black, inner
primaries were gray and the black "M" pattern
was apparent. The "M" pattern is
normally confined to the secondary coverts.

83-57

The pattern on this individual appeared to be in both the secondary and primary feathers.

We were not fortunate enough to observe the gull in close contact with other gulls in the area for a size comparison.

The gull remained alone while flying over the NE and NW dredge ponds. Twice it flew south to the Missouri river, joined a group of other gulls ~~and~~ and returned alone to the northernmost dredge ponds.

We observed the gull with 7x35mm binoculars for 30 minutes, most of which the gull spent flying. It did land alone on the west edge of the NW pond and remained on the shore for ~~at~~ 5 minutes.

We eliminated the possibility of the gull being an immature Bonaparte's gull using the following criteria:

1. Leg color. The gull's legs and feet were entirely black. Bonaparte's gull

have reddish legs. ~~was~~ This was ⁸³⁻⁰⁷ apparent
~~at~~ at great distance on the immature
Bonaparte's gulls present.

2. ~~B~~ Primary feathers. The gull had
black outer primaries and gray inner
primaries. ~~B~~ Immature Bonaparte's
having some obvious white inner
primaries.)

3. Behavior. Although this may
seem rather unscientific, the gull
not joining the groups of feeding
or loafing gulls present seems
significant to me.