

California Gull

3 Sep 1995

Record Number: 95-65

Classification: A-P

Runnells A., Red Rock dam, Marion Co., IA

\*S. Dinsmore, \*Sinclair, \*Kent, \*Fuller

to 6 Sep; IBL 66:21, 96; P-0477, Dinsmore and Sinclair 1996

DOCUMENTATIONS

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

Jim Sinclair, 810 N. B St., Indianola [3/24/96]

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

Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

PHOTOGRAPHS

Stephen J. Dinsmore, P-0477

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 66:21

Records Committee: IBL 66:96

Dinsmore, S. J., and J. Sinclair. 1996. California Gull at Runnells Wildlife Area. IBL 66:110.

VOTE: 7 A-P

A-P, 1st basic adult [sic].

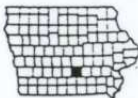
A-P, Photo shows dipped-in-ink bill on very dark first-year bird. Unfortunately, the upper wing and upper tail are not well seen [in the photo]. A Herring Gull of this age would have a larger all-dark bill.

95-65

## CALIFORNIA GULL AT RUNNELLS WILDLIFE AREA

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE AND JIM SINCLAIR

On 3 September 1995 we observed a first-basic California Gull east of Swan, Marion County. The bird was with a group of about 300 Ring-billed Gulls on a shallow pond at the Runnells Wildlife Area. We watched and photographed the bird from 10:55 a.m.-12:24 p.m. The bird was slightly bulkier and longer than the largest Ring-billed Gulls. However, the bird was not so large as to stand out by size alone. In general, the plumage was very brown, reminiscent of a juvenile Herring Gull. The bill was slender, long, and distinctly bicolored. The basal two thirds were pink, the distal one third black. The distinction between pink and black on the bill was sharp. The bill had a slight bulge at the tip. The eye was dark. From brief glimpses of the legs, they appeared dull pink. The body, including head, neck, underparts, and mantle, was brown except that the face and throat were slightly paler. The rectrices were entirely dark with no tail band. The rump was paler than the tail and mantle and was finely barred with dark brown. The undertail coverts were also pale with fine, dark barring. The upperwing pattern was as follows: primaries entirely black except slightly paler on base of the innermost one or two, tips of secondaries black, greater secondary coverts dark with pale tips, median and lesser secondary coverts dark brown. The effect was a dark bar along the trailing edge and a paler bar above it, contrasting with dark color on the remainder of the innerwing. The double bar effect on the upperwing was not as clear as illustrated in some field guides because of the lack of contrast between the dark bar on the greater secondary coverts and color of the median and lesser secondary coverts. Based on these features, we concluded the bird was in first-basic plumage. However, the bird may still have been in transition since the legs were not bright pink. Grant (1986) does not indicate the timing of molt in California Gulls. However, several other large larids (e.g., Herring Gull) can acquire first-basic plumage as early as September (Grant 1986).



This bird could not be relocated the next day, but was reportedly seen on 5, 6 September below the dam of Red Rock Reservoir (IBL 66:21). This represents the sixth record of California Gull in Iowa. All of the records are in the period September-December and have occurred since 1989. This suggests that California Gulls may be rare but regular fall migrants in Iowa, especially at some of the larger reservoirs and lakes. The records are evenly split between birds in first-basic and adult-basic plumage.

### LITERATURE CITED

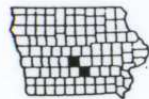
Grant, P. J. 1986. Gulls: A Guide to Identification. T & A. D. Poyser, Staffordshire, England.

4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames, IA 50014 and 810 North B St., Indianola, IA

## TWO LAUGHING GULLS IN CENTRAL IOWA

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

On 3 September 1995, Jim Sinclair and I saw an adult Laughing Gull in basic plumage with a group of about 300 Ring-billed Gulls east of Swan, Marion County. The gulls were feeding on a shallow pond on part of the Runnells Wildlife Area. We studied the bird from 11:00 a.m.-12:24 p.m. at distances as close as 50 m. The bird was about 20% smaller than the average Ring-billed Gull and noticeably slimmer and longer-winged. Other features noted include the slate-gray mantle and black primaries, lack of any white separating the black primaries from the gray upperwing, the mostly white head with a grayish smudge on the nape behind the eyes, black legs, and the black bill with a pronounced gonydeal angle. The size and shape of the bill were similar to those of nearby Ring-billed Gulls. The very tip of the bill appeared pale. Based on these features, we aged the bird as an adult in basic (third-basic) plumage. I took several photos of the bird as it rested on the mud and water. This bird remained here through 6 September.



On 19 October 1995 I observed an adult Laughing Gull in basic plumage above the dam of Saylorville Reservoir in Polk County. I was scanning a large flock of Ring-billed Gulls feeding in the middle of the lake when I noticed a slightly smaller gull with a dark gray mantle and upperwings, dark underwings, a black bill, and a nearly white head. I studied the bird in detail from 9:40-10:32 a.m. and from 1:45-2:20 p.m. The plumage of this bird was similar to that of the bird described above. Additionally, I noted that the undersides of the primaries were black, not pale like nearby Franklin's Gulls. I aged the bird as an adult in basic (third-basic) plumage based on the wing and tail patterns. I returned the next day (20 October) and found the bird feeding with Ring-billed Gulls in the same area.

Laughing Gulls are rare visitors to Iowa, but records appear to be on the increase. These represent the 16th and 17th records of Laughing Gulls in Iowa, all of them since 1989. By month, the records are from April (2), May (1), July (5-two remaining into August), August (3), September (4), and October (2). It now appears that a few Laughing Gulls reach Iowa every year. A few adults are seen in spring, probably migrants that overshoot their normal breeding grounds. Post-breeding dispersal in late summer and fall (July-October) produces the majority of the records, usually juveniles.

4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames, IA 50014

## RED PHALAROPE AT SPIRIT LAKE

LEE A. SCHOENEWE

On 29 November 1994, I decided to take the afternoon off work and head for Spirit Lake in Dickinson County. I had received a phone call from Stephen Dinsmore who indicated several Oldsquaw had been seen on Spirit Lake. He also said that Gordon Brown of Ames had reported a Red Phalarope off Marble Beach over the weekend. I figured there was a good chance to add an Oldsquaw to my life list, and the Red Phalarope was, well, a hope and a prayer.





California Gull P-0477  
Runnells A., Marion Co., IA  
3 Sep 1995 Steve Dinsmore 95.65

< 0001 19-07 N1N1N1+02RU 947 >

California Gull P-0477  
Runnells A., Marion Co., IA  
3 Sep 1995 Steve Dinsmore 95.65

> 0004 19-01 N060+N1N12N 20-61 400 <

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: California Gull  
 Number: 1 first-basic  
 Location: 1 mi e. of Swan, Marion Co. (Runnells, W.A.)  
 Habitat: pool of shallow water  
 Date: 3 September 1995  
 Time: 10:55 a.m.-12:24 p.m.  
 Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50014  
 Others who saw bird: Jim Sinclair

Description of bird(s): We arrived at the pond and were just beginning to check over the 300+ Ring-billed Gulls present when I noticed a slightly larger, very brown gull with a distinct bicolored bill. After watching the bird for several minutes, I confirmed my initial suspicions that the bird was a California Gull. We studied the bird as it fed and flew around the pond for more than an hour.

The bird was slightly bulkier and longer than the largest Ring-billed Gulls present. However, the bird was not so large as to stand out by size alone. In general, the bird had a very brown plumage, reminiscent of that of a juvenile Herring Gull. The bill was slender, long, and distinctly bicolored. The basal two thirds were pink, the distal one third black. The distinction between pink and black on the bill was sharp. The bill had a slight bulge at the tip. The bill just like the bill of a Ring-billed Gull except that it was slightly longer and had a bulge at the tip. The eye was dark. Leg color was hard to see well since the bird was either resting on the water or in flight. However, in my few glimpses of the legs they appeared dull pink. The body, including head, neck, underparts, and mantle, was brown except that the face and throat were slightly paler. Once, I thought I saw some gray edgings to the scapulars, but this may have been an artifact of the lighting. The tail and wing patterns were studied several times in flight. The rectrices were entirely dark, e.g. no tail band. The rump was paler than the tail or mantle and was finely barred with dark brown. The undertail coverts were also pale with fine, dark barring. The upperwing pattern was as follows: primaries entirely black except for slightly paler on base of innermost one or two, tips of secondaries black, greater secondary coverts dark with pale (whitish) tips, median and lesser secondary coverts dark brown. Thus, the innerwing exhibited a dark bar along the trailing edge, a paler bar above it, contrasting with dark color on the remainder. The double bar effect of this species was not as clear as illustrated in the NGS guide because of the lack of contrast between the dark bar on the greater secondary coverts and color of the median and lesser secondary coverts.

The general plumage, bicolored bill, and pinkish legs indicate the bird was in first-basic plumage. However, I suspect the bird may still have been in transition since the legs were clearly not bright pink. Grant (1986) does not indicate the timing of molt in California Gulls. However, several other large larids (e.g. Herring Gull) can acquire first-basic plumage by September (Grant 1986). I took several photos of the bird when it was resting on the water.

Similar species and how eliminated: Ring-billed and Herring gulls are the two most likely species of confusion. Ring-billed Gull never shows this much brown in any plumage, has a dark tail band in immature plumages, has a different wing pattern, and is structurally different from California Gull.

20-79

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Herring Gull is more similar in first-basic plumage, but always shows a pale window on the inner primaries, lacks the double dark bar effect in the innerwing, is larger, and very rarely shows a strongly bicolored bill.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with clear skies and the sun behind us. Estimated viewing distance was 50-100m. I used 10x42 binoculars and a 20-60x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have extensive experience with this species from recent work in Montana and Nebraska. I have also seen three previously in Iowa.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America  
Grant (1986) Gulls: A Guide to Identification

How long before field notes made: 1 hour after sighting

How long before this form completed: 4 September 1995

The bird was slightly larger than the largest King-billed Gull I have seen. However, the bill was not so large as to stand out by its shape. In general, the bird had a very brown plumage, reminiscent of that of a juvenile Herring Gull. The bill was slender, long, and distinctly bicolored. The basal two-thirds were pink, the distal one-third black. The distinction between pink and black on the bill was sharp. The bill had a slight ridge at the tip. The bill just like the bill of a King-billed Gull except that it was slightly longer and had a bulge at the tip. The eye was dark, leg color was hard to see well since the bird was either resting on the water or in flight. However, in my few glimpses of the legs they appeared dull pink. The body, including head, neck, nape, and mantle, was brown except that the face and throat were slightly paler. Once I thought I saw some gray edgings to the scapulars, but this may have been an artifact of the lighting. The tail and wing patterns were washed several times in flight. The coverts were entirely dark, e.g. no tail band. The rump was paler than the tail or mantle and was finely barred with dark brown. The underwing coverts were also pale with fine dark barring. The upperwing pattern was as follows: primary coverts black except for slightly paler on base of innermost one or two tips of secondary black, greater secondary coverts dark with pale (whitish) tips, median and lesser secondary coverts dark brown. Thus, the innerwing exhibited a dark bar along the trailing edge, a paler bar above it contrasting with dark color on the remainder. The double bar effect of this species was not as clear as illustrated in the NGS guide because of the lack of contrast between the dark bar on the greater secondary coverts and color of the median and lesser secondary coverts. The general plumage, bicolored bill, and pinkish legs indicate the bird was in first-basic plumage. However, I suspect the bird may still have been in transition since the legs were clearly not bright pink. Grant (1986) does not indicate the timing of molt in California Gulls. However, several other large birds (e.g. Herring Gull) can acquire first-basic plumage by September (Grant 1986). I took several photos of the bird when it was resting on the water.

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How long before field notes made: 1 hour after sighting

How long before this form completed: 4 September 1995

DOCUMENTATION FORM  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

95-65

What species? California Gull How many? 1  
Location? .5 mile east of Swan, Marion Co  
Type of Habitat? receding backwater in T.M. River floodplain  
When? date(s): 9/5/95 time: 11 am to 12:30 pm  
Who? your name and address: Tim Sinclair, 810 N. B St., Indianapolis, Ia  
Others with you: Steve Dinsmore  
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.

First year gull, 10 to 15% larger than the Ring-billed Gulls it was with. Bird was round-headed with a dark eye and a strongly bicolored bill. Face, throat and fore head were pale with faint gray-brown mottling. Mantle, upper wings and neck were a medium to dark brown with faint lighter mottling. Primaries were entirely black. The dark double scapular bar was visible when the bird flew and was particularly evident when the bird landed on the water and kept its wings extended for a moment.

Similar species; how eliminated:

at first glance the overall coloration indicated first year Herring Gull, however, three prominent features eliminated this species. the overall size was only slightly larger than comparable Ring-bills, the bicolored bill - very light on the basal two thirds and black on the distal third - and the overall gentle impression of the head, which included rounded head, relatively small bill.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? no - once the bird  
If yes, explain: was closely studied

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

Great conditions - distance from 100-200 yds  
10x42 glasses 40x scope

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

extensive with Herring Gulls

References and persons consulted before writing description:

AGS Field Guide while observing bird

How long before field notes made? \_\_\_\_\_ this form completed? 24 hours

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



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DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

**Species:** California Gull; **Number:** 1 1st winter

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

**Date:** 5 September 1995; **Time:** 4:00 to 4:45 p.m.

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

**Others before/with/after:** found by Steve Dinsmore on 3 Sep at Swan, seen on 6 Sep by Jim Fuller.

**Habitat and circumstances:** spillway and gravel bar below dam.

**Description of bird:** I first recognized this overall gray-brown gull when it was flying with Ring-billed Gulls. It was 10 to 20% larger than Ring-bills with longer wings and heavier body. The bill was pale pink with a "dipped in ink" black tip (outer one-fourth). The upper wing was black on the outer wing, with a dark secondary bar on the inner wing and a less prominent second bar proximally. The rest of the inner wing was lighter brown. The underwing was brown with a lighter window in the area of the inner primaries and outer secondaries (a triangular area). The tail had a wide dark brown tip (one-third to one-half). The base of the tail was white with barring and extended up the back in an indistinct V. Later the bird was observed on the gravel bar. The bill was pink with black tip. The bill was longer and thicker than that of Ring-bills, but not bulbous at the tip. The head was longer and larger than that of Ring-bills. The eye was dark. The throat and upper breast were whiter with mottled brown patches. The legs were about the same length as Ring-bills and were a dingy yellow with pinkish cast (much darker and drabber than Ring-bills). The folded primaries were black and extended beyond the tail. The tertials were dark centrally with a row of light dots posteriorly and anteriorly. The coverts were flecked and the back and scapulars were plainer. The undertail area was white, but I may have seen some barring in flight.

**Voice:** not heard.

**Similar species:** First-year Ring-billed Gulls were present. They were lighter brown, much more contrasty, and had gray developing in the mantle. First-year Herring Gull would be noticeably bulkier, have a large bulbous bill that would be mostly dark at this time of year, and would not show the double wing stripe.

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

**Light:** overcast looking southeast; **Distance:** 30 to 100 yards; **Optics:** 10x binocular, 20x scope.

**Previous experience:** Have seen and photographed many in California and described one first-year bird in Iowa in October 1990.

**References before/after viewing:** I looked at National Geographic Guide between the flight observations and observations on the gravel bar.

**Time of notes:** after each observation period; **Final typing:** 20 hours.

95-65

## DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

**SPECIES:** California Gull (First Year)

**LOCATION:** Gravel bar below Red Rock Reservoir Dam (Marion Co.)

**DATE & TIME:** 6 September (6:58-7:30 AM)

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

**OTHERS:** This bird is probably the same one discovered by Steve Dinsmore and Jim Sinclair near Swan on 3 September. Seen later by Tom Kent.

**DESCRIPTION:** The bird was first observed standing on a gravel bar below the Red Rock Dam with a group of about a hundred Ring-billed Gulls. It was generally quite brown, and darker than any of the immature Ring-billeds. It was also noticeably larger than any Ring-billed. In addition its head and bill were both proportionately larger than those of any Ring-billed. It was generally mottled brown, with quite dark brown tail and wing tips. The legs were a dull gray-pink color. The bill was yellow-pink with a black tip. The eye was dark. After a couple of minutes, the bird flew around, usually in the spillway. In flight, other features noted were an upperwing with a dark brown tip and double-dark lines on the trailing edge. (secondaries dark and then a light strip, and the greater coverts were dark). The underwing had a dark tip, but otherwise was light, and almost silvery in appearance. The tail had a broad dark brown terminal band, and the rump was white with dark brown cross streaking.

**SIMILAR SPECIES:** First year Ring-billed gull is generally lighter with a white tail and black terminal band, and a very different upperwing. No other first year gull has the combination of black-tipped pink bill, double dark rows on trailing edge of upperwing, and dark brown tail band with brown cross streaked rump.

**VIEWING CONDITIONS & OPTICS:** Standing on the gravel bar the bird was 200 feet away, and I was looking mostly west. While flying, it was anywhere from 50-350 yards but always to the west, southwest or northwest. A KOWA TSN-4 telescope (20-60 X zoom) was used mostly at 20X. It was early morning on a cloudy day.

**PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE:** I have seen one other first-year bird of this species in the state at the Coralville Reservoir, but have seen numerous first-year birds on the west coast.

**REFERENCES and FIELD NOTES:** Field notes were taken at the time of viewing, and this form was typed on 13 September. No guides were seen until after field notes were written, and then the National Geographic guide was viewed.