

California Gull  
23 Nov 1989  
Credit I., Scott Co., IA  
L. Augustine, P. Petersen, J. Fuller  
IBL 60:11, 16, 61:85, Petersen 1991

Record Number: 89-40  
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Louise Augustine (includes letter), 23 Nov  
Peter C. Petersen, 23 Nov  
Jim Fuller, 24 Nov

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:11, 15  
Records Committee: IBL 61:85  
Petersen, P. C. 1991. California Gull at Davenport, first  
accepted Iowa record. IBL 61:121-122.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D: Good description; features mentioned by observers are collectively conclusive for this species. Especially helpful are dark eye noted by Augustine in direct comparison with congeners; bill coloration by Fuller; and size, shape and mantle and leg color in direct comparison.

A-D: Fuller noted both black and red on gonys, although other observers evidently did not see this well. There was consensus on size intermediate between Herring and Ring-bill, based on side-by-side comparisons. Eye color was consistently described as dark, but a question here. If the pupil color could be seen by all observers, and I've always found this extremely difficult in gulls, why couldn't the same observers see the red and black on bill? Anyway, leg color and darker mantle seem to rule out Herring and other similar species.

A-D: All necessary field marks noted by three well done documentations. Some giving more detail on some marks than others but taken together describes California Gull beyond reasonable doubt.

A-D: Good details on documentations.

A-D: Eye color and leg color together with mantle color and direct comparison to Ringbills and Herrings (also bill color) are convincing.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- Dinsmore, J. J., T. H. Kent, D. Koenig, P. C. Petersen, and D. M. Roosa. 1984. Iowa Birds. Iowa State Univ. Press, Ames. 356 pp.
- Livingston, J. R. 1985. Mountain Bluebird in Decatur County. Iowa Bird Life 55:19-20.
- Thelen, E. 1989. Mountain Bluebird in Palo Alto County. Iowa Bird Life 59:124.

1800 Sycamore, Atlantic, IA 50022

### LONG-BILLED CURLEW IN POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY

W. ROSS SILCOCK

On 4 July 1990, I visited the Iowa Power and Light (IPL) ponds in extreme southwestern Pottawattamie County. Very few birds were present, most notably the resident Piping Plovers, but my attention was drawn to a large shorebird preening near the water's edge. Closer examination by telescope showed that the bird had a very long decurved bill, no head stripes overall evenly and finely barred brownish-gray plumage, and long bluish legs. During preening, the wings were often extended to exhibit diagnostic cinnamon wing linings. These features identified the bird as a Long-billed Curlew, a conclusion concurred with by Tanya Bray, who arrived soon after I did and also saw this bird. It did not stay long, however, allowing a total viewing time of only about 20 minutes. The Records Committee of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union has accepted this record.

This is only the third record of this species in Iowa in the last 50 years. Carl Priebe observed one with a Marbled Godwit at the Riverton area in Fremont County 11 April 1989 (Priebe 1990), and one collected 12 November 1968 in Emmet County is now in the Iowa State University collection (Priebe 1990).

Long-billed Curlew breeds throughout the interior western United States and adjacent Canada in its preferred habitat of moist grasslands. Populations on the high plains sections of the Great Plains are doing well, but populations further east are not. The species has not bred for many years in Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois (Johnsgard 1981). The most easterly populations still doing well are in the Nebraska Sandhills, western South Dakota, and southwestern Kansas.

Considering the disappearance of eastern breeding populations, the paucity of records of migrants in Iowa is not surprising. Most Great Plains long-bills presumably migrate west of Iowa to their wintering grounds in interior Texas and the western Gulf Coast. Also strong flyers like Long-billed Curlew probably are non-stop migrants. It is also possible that the very few recent records east of the current breeding and wintering ranges are referable to the very small population which winters on the southern Atlantic Coast.

The three Iowa records cited above illustrate the timing pattern of this species' migration. Spring migration occurs in April and early May, with most egg laying in May and June (Johnsgard 1979). The 11 April 1989 Fremont County record appears to have been an off-course spring migrant. As in many North American shorebirds, fall migration timing differs by age-class (with varying amounts of overlap). Females abandon the young when the latter are two or three weeks old, leaving the males to



care for the brood (Johnsgard 1981). The Eurasian counterpart, the Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), considered part of a superspecies with *N. americana* (Mayr and Short, 1970), shows similar behavior. Females leave the brood to the males 10-20 days after the young hatch and join other females to migrate (Cramp and Simmons 1983). Given egg dates as early as 1 May in South Dakota (South Dakota Ornithologists' Union 1991) and 3 May in Saskatchewan (Bent 1928), and an incubation period of about 28 days (Johnsgard 1979), the 4 July bird in Pottawattamie County was probably a female which laid eggs in late May, close to the peak laying date for the species, and thus not at all unusual as a date of occurrence for a migrating female. The Emmet County record probably is of a very late juvenile migrant, the last age class to migrate. Such late dates (those in October and November) are unusual, and probably indicate a tendency for juveniles to disperse before migrating south. Most migration to wintering areas takes place in August and September. Indeed, all birds have left the Nebraska breeding grounds by early August (Johnsgard 1979).

#### LITERATURE CITED

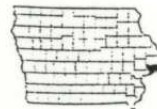
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- Cramp, S., and K. E. L. Simmons (eds.). 1983. Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, vol. 3. Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford. 913 pp.
- Johnsgard, P. A. 1979. Birds of the Great Plains. Univ. Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE. 539 pp.
- Johnsgard, P. A. 1981. The Plovers, Sandpipers, and Snipes of the World. Univ. Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE. 493 pp.
- Mayr, E., and L. L. Short. 1970. Species Taxa of North American Birds. Publ. Nuttall Ornithol. Club 9, 127 pp.
- Priebe, C. 1990. Long-billed Curlew in southwestern Iowa. Iowa Bird Life 60:20.
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P. O. Box 300, Tabor, IA 51653

### CALIFORNIA GULL AT DAVENPORT, FIRST ACCEPTED IOWA RECORD

PETER C. PETERSEN

On Thanksgiving afternoon, 23 November 1989, Louise Augustine of Peoria, one of Illinois' top birders, called to say she had just seen a California Gull on the ice at Credit Island harbor in west Davenport. Mary Lou and I hastened to South Concord Street which provides an unobstructed view of the harbor. We located the bird standing on the ice at 4:25 p.m. It was intermediate in size between Herring and Ring-billed gulls which were standing with the California. We noted the head and body were white with some brown streaking on the head. The bill was yellow with a small dark area near the tip of the lower mandible. The legs were gray green. The mantle was slightly darker than nearby Herring Gull mantles. The head was very rounded, but eye color could not be determined. We observed the



89-40



bird with a Swift scope at 30 power. Louise used a Questar. The bird was about 100 meters away with the sun directly behind us. The bird was seen several days later by Jim Fuller.

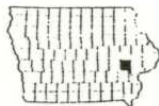
Illinois had eleven records of the California Gull through 1987 (Bohlen, H. D. *The Birds of Illinois*, 1989) and two more for the fall of 1989, one on 12 August-6 September at Rice Lake Conservation Area near Canton and another from 20 October-7 December at Carlisle Lake (*Illinois Birds and Birding* 6:44, 1990). Several earlier Iowa sightings were not accepted by the I.O.U. Records Committee. Late fall gull concentrations should be checked carefully for vagrant California Gulls.

235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport, IA 52803

## SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER AT CORALVILLE RESERVOIR

THOMAS H. KENT

On 14 October 1990, I went to the Coralville Reservoir area in Johnson County to look over the many shorebirds I had seen the day before just in case something unusual had come in. At 9:20 a.m., I was scoping a large number of snipe, pectorals, and Killdeer that were in shallow pools and low wet grassy areas on the Swan Lake Road west of Greencastle Avenue when I first found the juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. I made the following notes at 10:05 a.m.: "As large as largest pectoral. Overall shape and behavior like a pectoral. First noticed that the bird had a neat rufous cap and prominent white superciliary line. Then noticed buffy color to breast. Bird darker on back and scapulars than pectorals and more rufous overall. Tertials neatly edged with rufous, and scapulars and coverts more rufous than any pectoral."



The shorebirds flew to a nearby pond. When I relocated them at 9:55 a.m., I was able to pick the bird out easily and get better looks: "The white line over the eye dips behind the eye, widens, and appears to go to the nape. Black line in front of eye (lores) but not prominent behind the eye. I did not see any color in the eye line nor did I detect an eye ring. I got an excellent look at the breast -- soft reddish-buff with no streaks and no bib line. Breast color tapers off at belly and throat is lighter. Rest of underparts white. Bill all dark. Legs dirty yellow."

I went home and called people. A crowd gathered after noon, but the bird was not relocated until late afternoon. It was with a large flock of pectorals and was seen intermittently. At 6:30 p.m I made notes of the following additional observations: "Saw fine streaks on sides of breast. Supercilium extended in front of eye but thinner. Saw under rump where there was an indistinct gray smudge."

The sky was overcast in the morning, but mostly sunny in the afternoon. Most sightings were at an estimated 30 to 40 yards with a 20-power Bushnell telescope or through a Kowa telescope with zoom eyepiece.

The only other species it could be confused with was Pectoral Sandpiper. The most distinctive feature of the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was the plain, cinnamon-buff breast without bib line or streaking centrally. The soft breast color shaded off evenly to the lower belly and throat. Some pectorals had very weak breast markings, but on close inspection all had streaks and a sharp bib line. The solid rusty cap differed from any pectorals; some pectorals appeared a bit rusty on the cap, but some streaking was seen on such individuals. The eye line appeared white, and it dropped and widened

posteriorly. Some pectorals had light eye lines but they were off-white, less distinct, and straighter. The juvenile feathers of the upper parts were edged with rufous; this was especially prominent on the tertials. Some pectorals appeared to have rusty edging on the tertials, but this was dependent on lighting and at least one rufous appearing pectoral had the color more in the center of the feathers with grayer edging. The gray smudging on the undertail coverts I saw once. I only had a glance at a nearby pectoral for comparison, so I was not very confident of this mark.

Sharp-tailed Sandpipers nest in north-central Siberia and migrate through eastern Asia to Australia and New Zealand. Vagrants are noted on the West Coast of United States and to a much lesser extent in the Midwest and the East. They are almost all juveniles found from September to November but there are a few spring records. This is the third record of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in Iowa. The first, on 3 October 1974, was within one mile of the present location (Halmi, N. S. 1974. Sight record of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper near Iowa City. *Iowa Bird Life* 44:106). The second was at Credit Island in Scott County on 30 September 1988 (Petersen, P. C. 1989. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Davenport. *Iowa Bird Life* 59:90-91).

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

## WILD TURKEY SWIMMING IN LAKE MACBRIDE

RICHARD JULE HOLLIS

Carol Thompson and I saw a Wild Turkey swimming in Lake Macbride on the morning of 2 December 1990. This particular bird clearly did not intend to swim. But after flying across the south arm of the lake, more or less parallel to the causeway and gradually losing elevation, the bird probably had no choice as it had been airborne for between a quarter and half a mile. It splashed down about 10-15 feet short of the shore. It swam reasonable strongly and buoyantly until it reached shore, climbed up the bank, shook off its feathers, and trotted away.

I have not seen a turkey swimming before nor am I aware of other records such as this. Although records of various land birds swimming are not unusual, this record of such a large land bird being able to swim seems to me to be quite unusual.

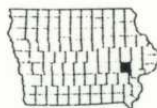
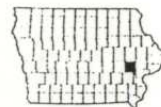
3351 Lower West Branch Road, Iowa City, IA 52245

## FIRST-WINTER CALIFORNIA GULL AT CORALVILLE RESERVOIR

THOMAS H. KENT

On 27 October 1990, at Babcock Access, in Johnson County I scanned the hundreds of gulls and shorebirds for about an hour and was about to leave when I saw a dark brown, first-year gull that I thought would be my first Herring Gull of the fall.

The bird was slightly larger than all the Ring-billed Gulls. The brown was not as dark as the usual juvenile Herring Gull that is seen at this time of year. I noted the light-colored bill. Later I saw a flesh-pink bill with small dark black tip. The wings



89-40  
14 December 1989

Dear Mr. Bendorf,

If I need to complete the documentation on an Iowa form you will have to send me one. I think Davenport is in Scott County but if it isn't, correct the form. I have not hided this area before and right now do not have access to Iowa Map-

Pete Peterson called me and asked me if I had documented the bird. Since I do not normally hied in Iowa, I had not throught about it. So he gave me your address. Having seen so many California Gulls in Illinois, I did not think too much of it. I did think it good enough to call Pete on Thanksgiving day -

Louise  
Augustine



89-40

1. Species: California Gull Number seen: 1  
 (If known) Age: Adult Sex: ? Plumage: Winter
2. Location (including county): Credit Island - Davenport, Iowa - Scott County?
3. Date(s): November 23 1989 - Thanksgiving Day Time of day: 12:00pm to 1:00pm
4. Observers -- Your name: Louise Augustine Phone: (309) 579-3061  
 Address: Box 237, RR2 Chillicothe, Illinois Zip 61523  
 Others present: Jerome Augustine (brother) David & Julie Augustine  
 Others before or after you: Pete Peterson saw it after I called him that afternoon.
5. Describe the habitat the bird(s) was found in and the surrounding habitat:  
 This is an unfamiliar Area for me - I have never birded there before - The Place Credit Island - Backwater of Mississippi River - There was some ICE and open water - Many Gulls were in this Backwater area - on ice and in water. Probably around 1500 Gulls -
6. Description: Describe in great detail (but only include what actually was seen in the field (the size, shape and color pattern of the bird(s)). Include a description of the bill, eye, legs, feet, tail, body and wings as well as other diagnostic characteristics.
- Size - intermediate between Herring and Ring-billed Gulls.  
 This bird was standing between R-B and Herring for good comparison -
- Mantle - Noticeably darker than either Ring-billed or Herring.  
 This bird had a dark gray mantle - not as dark as Lesser Black Backed Gull.
- Eye Color - This bird had a dark eyes - This was noticeable in viewing with scope - Good comparison of eye of Herring and Ring-billed - These latter were yellow eyed -
- Bill - the bill was yellow with only a Gonyx spot that appeared black.
- Head - Streaked - rightly
- Legs - The legs - were not Pink - not yellow - when scanning the gulls I guess the leg color first called my attention to this Bird. the leg color was ashy-gray-green - Probably more gray than green.
- Over all the bird appeared slimmer than Herring. Viewed in good back light, the mantle was distinctly darker gray than the other two species present. The eye color and leg color were also obvious to people who knew nothing about Herring - Ring-billed or California Gulls.



Species: California Gull Date seen: 23 November 1989 Observer: Louise Augustine

89-40

7. Similar species (explain how eliminated):

Herring Gull - darker mantle - Dark eye - Leg color - ashy-green <sup>gray</sup> not Pink - smaller size - slimmer build  
Ring-billed Gull - mantle too dark - dark eye - Bill had only a spot  
Leg color not yellow - this bird larger than Ring-billed gulls -

8. Describe the bird's behavior:

Sitting on ice with Ring-billed and Herring Gulls

9. Describe the song or call notes heard:

NOT Heard

10. Viewing conditions:

Optical equipment used (type, power): Questar - 50-80 power - Zeiss 10x40 binoculars

Closest distance to bird (how measured): Several hundred feet - not more than 300 ft. for ice

Lighting and weather: Lighting Good - at Baek - Temperature - low enough.

Was the bird photographed? NO By whom? \_\_\_\_\_ Attached? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Summarize previous experience with this species and similar species:

I have seen this bird in Illinois - each year for the past few years - It has occurred in 1st year and adult plumage. I spend the summers in Colorado and have seen them there numerous times for the last 17 summers.  
In Illinois - seen at Chautauque - Powerton - Rice Lake - Lock and dam Peoria Riverfront Park - Peoria -

12. Other observers who did not agree with the identification (explain):

NONE

13. List books and illustrations consulted and advice received. How did these influence this description?

I showed my brother and his son and wife the picture from National Geographic - other wise I consulted no books. I was initially trying to get them to see difference between the Herring and Ring-billed gulls.

14. How long after observing the bird(s) before field notes completed? Next day

15. How long after observing the bird(s) before this form completed? Completed 14 December 1989 on

Mail this completed form to:

Avian Ecology Program, Natural Heritage Division Request of  
Dept. of Conservation, Springfield, IL 62701 Pete Peterson

If you have observed a common bird species during a season of abundance, verification is achieved simply by returning there again in season. If, however, the observation involves a rare species, or a common species out of season or at an unusual location, and you wish to share this experience with the scientific community, special documentation is necessary.

An acceptable documentation consists of one or more of the following: a collected, diagnostic specimen; a diagnostic photograph; a diagnostic recording of the bird's voice; or, an accurate and detailed written description of the observation. It must be emphasized that a request for documentation is not an affront, but an effort to perpetuate a record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for all to examine. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation irrespective of the observer.

After I called Pete on Thanksgiving Day I did not think more about it - He gave me the address to send to but I did not have Inwa documentation form.



DOCUMENTATION FORM  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

8940

What species? California Gull How many? 1 - ad.

Location? Credit Island harbor from S. Concord St. Davenport, IA

Type of Habitat? ice covered harbor, Miss R. backwater

When? date(s): Nov. 23, 1989 time: 4:25 to 4:33 PM

Who? your name and address: Peter C. Petersen, 235 McClellan Blvd. Davenport, IA

Others with you: Mary Lou Petersen

Others before or after you: Louise Augustine

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.

Adult gull seen with about 60-70 Ring-billed & Herring Gulls on ice. Typical adult gull of this group - head & lower body white with tan flecking on head & neck. Bill yellow with dark area near tip on lower mandible only. Head shape more round than in other two species. Mantle slightly darker gray than in Herring and Ring-bills. Legs gray-green, very noticeably contrasting with Herring and Ring-bills. This bird is intermediate in size between Herring and Ring-bills which were in same scope field, closer to Ring-bill. Pupil color not perceivable. Primary tip pattern much like Herring & Ring-bills when perched - not flushed.

Similar species; how eliminated:

Herring Gull - bird too small, leg color quite different (gray-green vs. pink) head shape rounder, dark markings on bill & neck  
Ring-billed Gull - bird larger, leg color quite different (gray-green vs. yellow), lacked clearing on both upper & lower mandible, head shape rounder, bill larger.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? no  
If yes, explain:

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

late afternoon sun directly behind observers,

bird est. to be 100 m away

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Have seen this species on many previous occasions in the nest.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Wat. Geo. guide seabird book (Harrison) + Master Guide consulted prior to observation

How long before field notes made? 10 min. this form completed? 1 hr.

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



What species? CALIFORNIA GULL How many? 1 ADULT  
 Location? CREDIT ISLAND - DAVENPORT (WINTER)  
 Type of habitat? MISSISSIPPI RIVER  
 When? date(s): 24 NOVEMBER, 1989 time: APPROX 9:30 AM to FOR 20 MINUTES  
 Who? your name and address: JIM FULLER, 6 LONGVIEW KNOLL, RR26, IOWA CITY, IOWA 5224  
 others with you: RANDY PINKSTON  
 others before or after you: PETE PETERSEN

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.

FIRST SAW THE BIRD STANDING IN SHALLOW WATER AT THE WESTERN TIP OF CREDIT ISLAND - 50 YARDS AWAY (IN THE MIDDLE OF RING-BILLED AND HERRING GULLS) AND THEN SITTING ON WATER IN RIVER 100 YARDS AWAY. THE BIRD WAS LARGER THAN ANY RING-BILLED GULL AROUND IT, BUT WAS SMALLER THAN SOME OF THE HERRING GULLS, BUT ALMOST AS BIG AS 2 FIRST YEAR HERRING GULLS FLOATING ON RIVER. THE COLORATION OF FOLDED WING AND MANTLE WAS LIGHT GRAY AND A LITTLE (BUT NOTICEABLY) DARKER GRAY THAN THE RING-BILLED ADULTS. HOWEVER, IT DID NOT SEEM DARKER THAN THE MANTLE AND WINGS OF NEARBY ADULT HERRING GULLS. THE HEAD WAS SMALLER AND ROUNDER (RELATIVELY) THAN THE HERRING GULLS AND SMALLER IN COMPARISON TO BODY SIZE THAN THE RING-BILLED. THE BILL WAS ABOUT THE SAME LENGTH AS THE HERRING GULL'S, BUT WAS THINNER. IT ALSO HAD A BLACK SPOT WHICH WAS ALMOST TERMINAL ON LOWER MANDIBLE AND WHEN THE BIRD TURNED JUST RIGHT, A RED SPOT ADJOINING THE BLACK SPOT TO THE REAR. THE BILL WAS A YELLOW-YELLOW COMPARED TO THE MORE GRAY-YELLOW OF THE RING-BILLED. THE SIDES OF HEAD, NECK, AND NAPE HAD BROWN STREAKING OF WINTER GULLS, AND THERE WAS

Similar species and how eliminated:

SEE OVER

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

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

CLOUDY - LOOKING NORTH AT STANDING GULL AND  
 NORTHEAST AT BIRD ON WATER 8.5 X 44 SWIFT  
 BINOCULARS AND 20-BOX TSN4KOWA SCOPE

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

SEEN IN WESTERN STATES ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS

References and persons consulted before writing description:

HARRISON AND NAT'L GEOGRAPHIC GUIDE

How long before field notes made? IMMEDIATE this form completed? 34 HOURS

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



A PARTICULAR DARK SMUDGE BEHIND THE EYE. 89-40  
THE EYE WAS DARK, WHILE THE NEARBY RING-BILLED  
AND HERRING ADULTS ALL SHOWED A YELLOW EYE WHEN  
THEIR HEADS TURNED RIGHT. THE BREAST AND UNDER-  
PARTS WERE WHITE, AND THE TIP OF THE FOLDED WING  
WAS BLACK. UNFORTUNATELY I COULDN'T SEE LEG  
COLOR BECAUSE, WHEN STANDING, IT WAS ALWAYS  
BEHIND SOME OTHER GULL, AND WHEN IT FLEW I  
WAS PUTTING MY GLOVES ON.

#### OTHER SPECIES ELIMINATED

##### OTHER GRAY MANTLED GULLS

RING-BILLED ADULT HAS BLACK RING ON GRAY  
YELLOW BILL, IS SMALLER, AND HAS LIGHT EYE,  
AND RELATIVELY LARGER HEAD.

—  
HERRING GULL HAS RED SPOT ONLY ON MANDIBLE  
LARGER BILL, RELATIVELY LARGER HEAD, LIGHT EYE  
AND PINK LEGS, AS WELL AS GENERALLY LARGER  
SIZE.