

Lesser Black-backed Gull
29 Nov 1986
Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA
*S. Dinsmore, *Bray, *Wilson
IBL 57:17, 77

Record Number: 86-13
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Steve Dinsmore
Tanya Bray
Barbara L. Wilson

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 57:17
Records Committee: IBL 57:77

VOTE: 7-II

II, Size and mantle color certainly indicate this species, but leg color is less than definite. However, quoting Grant again as he speaks of leg color in this species, "Legs [are] deep- or creamy-yellow: a few (as high as 3% in some large smaples) have adult plumage but fleshy or greyish legs. These birds usally also have dark on the bill of variable extent, and are then ageable as probably fourth-winter which have yet to acquire full adult bare parts coloration." (p. 104).

II, An indepth description of Lesser Black-backed Gull from different observers. Other possibilities adequately eliminated to draw conclusion of Lessser Black-backed Gull. Distance proved to be a detriment but the long viewing interval helped to alleviate the problem. a very good study by all three documentations.

II, Thanks to obvious great effort on observers part a possible Western Gull can probably be eliminated by leg color and because Western probably wouldn't show so much streaking on head and neck.

II, Saw bird fitting this description 3/12 at Red Rock Res.

II, well-described.

II, Streaked head in winter suggests LBBG and according to Audubon's master guide, eliminates Western and Yellow-footed Gulls.

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation

86-13

by the Records Committee
of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: *Lesser Black-backed Gull*
DATE SEEN: *11-29-86*
SITE OF OBSERVATION: *Saylorville Res.*
OBSERVERS: *S. Dinsmore, T. Broy, B. Wilson*
DATE OF REVIEW: *4-3-87*
METHOD OF REVIEW: *Note via mail*
CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: *II*

COMMENTS:

*Obvious great effort on observers part
went into these indepth descriptions*

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.

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species? Lesser Black-backed Gull

How Many? 1 ad.

Location? Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co.

Habitat? sitting on ice above dam

Date? 29 Nov 1986

Time? 10:08 A.M. - 12:10 P.M.

Observers Name and address: Steve Dinsmore, Ames

Others who saw bird: Pete Wickham, Mark Brogie, Barb Wilson, Tanya Bray, Bery Engebretsen

Description of bird: I first noticed the bird because of its very dark mantle as compared to Herring and Ring-billed gulls. Over the next two hours, I took the following notes.

The bird was quite a bit larger than a Ring-billed Gull and slightly smaller than a Herring Gull. The mantle and wings were a very dark gray color (not really black). In flight, the mantle and wings were dark except for some white spots at the tips of the outer primaries and a narrow white trailing edge on the wing. The wingtips were darker than the rest of the wings and mantle. The underwing was very dark in the primaries and lighter near the rear of the wing. The bird also showed a dark carpal bar on the underwing in flight. In flight, the tail and rump were entirely white. The head and underparts were white except for some brown speckling on the breast and heavy brown streaking on the head and nape. There was a dark smudge around the eye. The bill was mostly yellow with a red spot near the tip of the lower mandible and some dusky color near the base of the bill. The legs were mostly pale and had a yellowish cast under good light. The feet appeared pinkish in the best light. When the bird was resting, its wingtips extended beyond the tail. After checking some of Barb Wilson's gull references that she had with her, we decided that the bird was molting from 3rd summer plumage to adult plumage. The bird had acquired most of its adult plumage.

Similar species and how eliminated: Great Black-backed Gull was eliminated by the smaller size, contrast between the wingtips and the rest of the wing, and by the heavy streaking on the head (head should be mostly white on a Great Black-backed Gull). California Gull was eliminated by the darker mantle, darker underwing and dark carpal bar, lack of a dark spot on the bill, and by the dark smudge at the base of the bill (this is characteristic of 3rd summer Lesser Black-backed Gulls and is never present on California Gulls).

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with the sun behind us and the sky partly to mostly cloudy. Estimated viewing distance was 250-300 yards at closest. I used a Bushnell 20-45x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I haven't seen any other Lesser Black-backed Gulls, but I have seen numerous Great Black-backed and California gulls.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America

How long before field notes were made? on spot

How long before this form was completed? 3 hours after sighting

LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL

Saylorville Reservoir, Polk County, Iowa

November 29, 1986

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Description:

Near Adult Plumage (3rd summer going into 4th winter)

- Size:** Slightly (perhaps one inch) smaller than adult Herring Gull in direct comparison. I would estimate the birds were less than one foot apart. When the LBBG stood next to a Ring-billed Gull, the Lesser Black-backed was much larger, chunkier, and generally more massive looking.
- Mantle:** Dark Slate Gray, several shades darker than the Herring and Ring-bills present. It was quite easy to relocate this bird by the dark mantle.
- Upper Wings:** In flight, dark slate gray with black tips to primaries. The dark tips had only a few white spots. Very noticeable white trailing edge to wing.
At rest, the wings were long, extending to or beyond the tail. The white trailing edge formed a white band that appeared continuous across the wing at about the base of the tail. Another white area (like a squarish patch) was visible at the rump which I assume to be the white leading edge of the wing.
- Underwing:** In flight: blackish outer primaries; pale gray inner primaries and secondaries, becoming almost silvery near body. Lesser underprimary coverts black. All other coverts, gray to dark gray.
- Tail:** Completely white.
- Head:** White heavily mottled and streaked with buff. The buff extended down the sides of the neck and on the sides of the breast. The forehead and front part of the crown were less streaked and looked white.
- Bill:** Dull yellow, dusky at the base. Slender and long, not massive as in Greater Black-backed Gull. Darker spot on lower mandible near tip. I could not distinguish the color. Bill seemed more slender than Herring Gull.

Breast and Belly: White

Legs: Grayish-yellow. Feet with pink webs.

Distance: 300 yards

Equipment: 25 x scope; 40 x scope

Behavior: Stood on ice with thousands of Herring and Ring-billed Gulls. For several minutes, slept with bill tucked in and body covering legs! Finally got up, walked around, affording good size comparisons with the other two gulls. Began making short flights, landing on ice, at one time picking at fish laying on ice. When we returned later that afternoon, the gull was not visible. Majority of gulls had moved much farther out onto lake, or were feeding below the dam.

Pages 1-2 written 8 hrs after sighting from notes taken with bud in view.

*Janya Bray
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Broy

Other species

California Gull eliminated by larger size, very dark gray mantle, and buff streaking rather than grayish on head.

Great Black-backed Gull - eliminated by size (this bird was definitely smaller than Herring), much less massive bill, and gray, not black mantle.

Western Gull eliminated by leg color and extreme unlikelihood in midwest.

Yellow-footed Gull is perhaps a possibility but unlikely. Also they apparently do not have streaked heads in winter.

Familiarity with species: none

Other observers: Steve Dinsmore, Barbara Wilson, Mark Brogie

Books consulted: In field: Nat. Geographic 74. plus an article Barb had of which I'm sure she will inform the committee!

At Home: Seabirds - Harrison

Lesser Black-backed Gull - 1

29 November 1986

Saylorville Reservoir, Polk County, Iowa

Description: The gull stood, preened, slept, walked on ice with several hundred gulls. Eventually it flew several short flights. A good-sized gull, definitely a size smaller than a Herring in close comparison but several sizes larger than a Ring-billed (also in direct comparison). Also chunkier + heavier-built than a Ring-billed. Over all, the bird was white with a dark gray mantle.

Bill: the bill was hard to see but occasionally we got good looks at it. It was yellow, brightest at the tip. There was red before the tip - very hard to see. The basal half or so was dusky on the sides. Bill long, not especially thin or stout.

Head: Forehead, throat white. Back of head + sides + back of neck heavily mottled with dusky brown. A dark area around the eye.

Underparts: Breast mostly white but sides mottled with dusky brown. There was a band of brown mottling on the lower breast, particularly visible when the bird slept with its head tucked under its wing. Belly white.

Mantle: dark gray. Definitely not black. Black of wing tips blends gradually into the dark gray mantle. There's little white in the wing tips. There ~~is~~ are white tips on the secondaries. Folded wings extend beyond tip of tail.

Rump + tail: all white. No dark tip on tail.

Legs: We tried hard to determine the leg color + at the great distance this was really hard to see. Mostly the legs were just there, an indeterminate medium dark color. Eventually ~~the~~ when the bird walked around we got hints of color, + they were somewhat contradictory. As it lifted its feet, we detected a hint of pink, probably on the webs. The legs showed hints of yellow, probably on the front. We decided they must be a dusky yellowish or brownish color elsewhere, but this is not real certain. Please note that we could easily see the pink legs of the adult Herring Gulls near the Lesser Black-backed. Certainly ~~the~~ legs weren't pink.

Under side of wing: Flight feathers very dark. Black patch by + distal to wrist. Other coverts gray, but axillars white + there's a light line in center of underwing, probably the greater coverts.

We decided the bird was a ~~sub~~ 4th-winter bird which had molted into adult plumage but was in the process of acquiring its adult bill + leg color. Perhaps an over confident decision, but it seems reasonable.

Description written November 30 from notes taken during the sighting.

Similar species:

Herring Gull: Our bird was definitely too dark a gray on the mantle, + was a size smaller.

Greater-Black-backed: our bird was too small + not dark enough on the mantle.

Slaty-backed Gull: Our bird was too small, smaller than a Herring Gull.

Yellow-footed Gull: Our bird did not seem to be dark enough on the mantle for this coastal species, but that is hard to be sure.

Bill didn't seem stout enough either, though we were probably too far to tell.

Western Gull: The one thing I can be sure about our bird's legs is that they were not pink - as are Western Gull's legs in all plumages.

California Gull: our bird was much too large + too dark for this species

Viewing situation:

Tanya + I drove over to Saylorville Reservoir to look for rarities.

We discussed what we'd like to find, + Tanya settled on Lesser Black-backed Gull. We drove up to find a small cluster of birders + telescopes on the first (west) scenic overlook on the dam. Steve Dinsmore walked up to say they had located a Lesser Black-backed Gull.

The bird was one of the closest gulls, but still 3-400 yds away, maybe a quarter mile even. We used 20-45x telescopes. The bird was north of us. No wind at first, later a light breeze. Sky weakly sunny, becoming lightly overcast. We watched the bird for at least 1 1/2 hours. We used National Geographic Field Guides + an article by Grant published in British Birds. We considered + easily eliminated Herring, Greater Black-backed, Slaty-backed, + California Gulls, but did not at the time consider the dark Pacific-coastal species as possibilities. Tanya + I may have been influenced by the fact the gull was already identified when we arrived, but we argued.

Other observers were: Tanya Bray, Steve Dinsmore, Mark Brogie, + a Mr. Wickam from Cedar Rapids. We all agreed.

Neither Tanya nor I ~~have~~ ^{have} seen this species before, though we've seen lots of other gulls + were very pleased our odd gull wasn't a Thayer's.

- Barbara L Wilson
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