

Great Black-backed Gull
28 Feb 1993
Bettendorf, Scott Co., IA
*J. Fuller
IBL 63:49, 64:68

Record Number: 93-07
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240 [11/27/93]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 63:49

Records Committee: IBL 64:68

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Good description of plumage and behavior.

A-D, Good description of first-winter bird.

A-D, I cannot improve on the documentor's analysis of this record. Adequate evidence that the bird reached Iowa.

DOCUMENTATION OF UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTING

SPECIES: Great Black-Backed Gull (First Winter)

LOCATION: Mississippi River between Bettendorf, Iowa and Moline, Illinois (Scott Co.).

DATE and TIME: 28 February, 1993 (11:05-11:35AM).

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

OTHER OBSERVERS: None.

BACKGROUND: There were about 40 gulls in a group standing on shelf ice very close to shore and only 100 feet away at the duck feeding area of Butterworth Parkway in Moline, Illinois. In the middle of the group was a gull that was darker than any of the other birds, even the immature Herring Gulls. It was lying down and hard to see completely behind other gulls. However, I could see a dark checkered back and a dark bill. Finally this bird stood up and soon was chasing a Herring Gull with a piece of bread, which it picked up after the Herring dropped the bread. It then came back and took away a small fish from another Herring Gull only about 75 feet away. It proceeded to eat that fish. It later flew around, finally sitting down on the rocks in the middle of the river. Most of the observation time was at very close range while the bird was in Illinois, but it did fly into Iowa, and finally sat down in the middle of the river, presumably Iowa. Virtually the entire observation time it was alongside both Herring and Ring-billed Gulls.

DESCRIPTION: In general size, this bird appeared almost twice the size of the Ring-billed Gulls, and considerably larger than the Herring Gulls, maybe 25%. It also had a massive bill compared to either of those species. The back was a checkered black and white. The head was large, white, and had no dark streaking on it. In fact, the only dark streaking was on the upper breast. The bill was very large, entirely black, except for the very tip, which was light. That feature could only be seen at close range. The eye was dark. The legs were a dull gray-pink, and they were noticeably thicker than those of the Herring or Ring-billed Gulls. When the bird flew, it had a dark tail band, which was pretty well defined. On the upperwing, there was a dark trailing edge, and the rest of the mantle was a checkered black and white. The ends of the wings were black. The under wing was gray, except for the ends, which were black.

BEHAVIOR: This bird certainly displayed aggressive behavior toward Herring Gulls, as it harassed and stole a piece of

bread, and a small fish from two separate birds of that species.

VIEWING CONDITIONS and OPTICS: It was a sunny day, and viewing conditions were excellent. I was looking mostly north at distances ranging from 75-100 feet. Both Swift Audubon (8.5 X 44) binoculars and KOWA TSN-4 telescope set at 20X were used.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen numerous juvenile and first summer birds of this species in the east, and I saw one first winter bird, also at the Quad Cities, previously.

FIELD NOTES and REFERENCES: I was looking at the bird from the car, and made immediate field notes. Harrison's SEABIRDS was checked that evening. This form was typed the following morning, March 1rst.