

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Record Number: 93-32

11 Dec 1993

Classification: A-D

Coralville Res., Johnson Co., IA

*Pinkston, *Bendorf, *Fuller

IBL 64:48, 68

DOCUMENTATIONS

Randy Pinkston (11 Dec), 526 Reno St., Iowa City 52245

Carl Bendorf (19 Dec), 824 Bluffwood Dr., Iowa City 52245

Jim Fuller (19 Dec), 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 64:48

Records Committee: IBL 64:68

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Good set of documents.

A-D, Basic plumage adult.

RARE BIRD DOCUMENTATION

Species: Lesser Black-backed Gull, Larus fuscus, adult in basic plumage

Date: December 11, 1993

Time: 3:30-4:00 p.m.

Location: Coralville Reservoir dam, Johnson County, Iowa

Description: Black-backed gull intermediate in size between nearby Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. Back, scapulars, and wings very dark gray (nearly black). Broad white tips noted on tertials, and white "mirrors" noted ^{near} at tips of outermost primaries. Head and neck white except for brownish streaking on crown, face, and hindneck. Iris bright yellow. Bill long and slender, with distinct hook at tip. Bill color bright orange-yellow (cheddar cheese) with large bright red spot on distal mandible (yellow and red on bill much brighter than on nearby Herring Gulls). Underparts immaculate white. Rump, uppertail coverts, and tail also immaculate white. Legs bright yellow; on one occasion they appeared slightly greenish-yellow. Not seen in flight.

Conditions: Clear, cold. Excellent afternoon lighting. Observed from 75-100 meters with Bausch and Lomb 30x telescope.

Similar Species: Size and appearance rule out all other regular and vagrant North American gulls.

Previous Experience: One previous sighting of an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull in basic plumage at Mustang Island, Texas, in January 1989.

--Randy Pinkston
526 Reno Street
Iowa City, IA
52245-3039
Ph.(319)351-0592

Lesser Black-backed Gull
December 19, 1993
Coralville Reservoir, Johnson County, Iowa

Carl Bendorf
824 Bluffwood Drive
Iowa City IA 52245

During the Iowa City Christmas Count, our party located a large group of gulls loafing and feeding in the upper reaches of the Coralville Reservoir. Of about 500 gulls total, nearly 90% were adult Ring-Billed Gulls and the rest were mostly winter adult and a few subadult Herring Gulls. We were in cars about 150 yards from the gulls. The sky was totally overcast but viewing conditions were reasonable. The total observation time was about 45 minutes during two sessions. I used 10X40 binoculars and a 22X spotting scope.

During the first scan of the sitting gulls, we easily picked out one bird with a dramatically darker mantel. I looked at the bird through the scope while Lanny Haldy noted my remarks upon which the following description is based:

An adult gull in between the size of adjacent Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. It was noticeable larger than the Ring-bills; not too much smaller than the Herrings. It differed from the Herrings in being a little less barrel chested and a little slimmer, more horizontal in posture.

The solidly dark mantel was dark slaty-gray (easily picked out of the group with the unaided eye). The sitting bird had white spots in the wing tips. The underparts were completely white. The head was lightly streaked with gray brown; the forehead just above the bill was white; top of the head more streaked and most dark around the eye. The streaking continued down the back of the head.

The bill appeared to be heavy throughout it's length (compared to a Ring-Bill) with a heavy hook at the end. It was very reddish on the distal half and seemed lighter colored at the base.

The bird was standing in water that came almost to the belly so seeing the color of the legs was extremely difficult. The few times I got a glimpse of the leg when it walked or preened, I couldn't really tell the color. However, I also couldn't definitively determine the color on many of the other nearby gulls either. The light was just too gray.

Other observers were Lanny Haldy, Randy Graesser, Dan Ray, Angela Ray, and Kathleen Kuenstling.

We briefly looked at the National Geographic field guide during and after the observation. This may have been the same bird seen 9 days earlier at the Coralville Dam by Randy Pinkston. This bird was seen later on the 19th by Tom Kent, Jim Fuller, and others.

I have seen Lesser Black-backed Gulls before, both winter adults, at Red Rock Reservoir in 1984 and in Iowa City several years ago.

These notes were made during the observation and the form typed the next day.

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD SIGHTING

SPECIES: Lesser Black-backed Gull (Winter Adult)

LOCATION: East of the north end of the Greencastle Road at the Coralville Reservoir (Johnson County).

HABITAT: Shallow water and mudflats.

DATE & TIME: 19 December, 1993 (12:55-1:15 PM).

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

OTHERS: With me was John McLure, and also present were Chris Edwards and Jonnie Ellsworth. Before and after were M.Ob.

DESCRIPTION: This bird was with a large flock of Ring-billed and Herring Gulls on a mud flat. At one time a first-winter Glaucous Gull was also within 5 feet of it. The bird was lying down sleeping some of the time, but did stand up, walk around and stretch its wings. The size was definitely less than the Glaucous, but it was also less than the Herring Gull nearby and noticeably greater than any of the several Ring-billeds nearby. The back and wings were a dark gray color (not black), and the wing tips were darker. All underparts were white. The head was also white with streaking on the head and neck. The bill was yellow with a red spot toward the tip of the lower mandible. Eye color could not be determined. Legs were yellow and similar to (maybe a little duller than) the legs of the Ring-billeds. The bird was not seen in flight, and no vocalization was heard.

SIMILAR SPECIES: All other dark mantled gulls have a larger size. They also have pink legs, with the exception of Yellow-footed Gull, which has never been known to wander from Baja and Southern California. Yellow-footed gull is also considerably larger. No one disagreed with identification.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen six previous adult birds of this species, and one first winter bird.

VIEWING CONDITIONS & OPTICS: The sky was mostly sunny in early afternoon. Looking ESE at 125 yards. KOWA-TSN4 telescope (20-60X), used at 20-40X.

FIELD NOTES & REFERENCES: Field notes made as I watched bird, and no references were used. This form was typed the following day.