

California Gull

7 Sep 1997

West Okoboji, Dickinson Co., IA

*Lee A. Schoenewe

IBL 68:13, 86

Record Number: 97-40

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Lee A. Schoenewe, 518 W. 4th St., Spencer 51301 [*6/9/98]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 68:13

Records Committee: IBL 68:86

VOTE: 6 A-D, 1 NA

NA, Herring Gull not adequately eliminated.

A-D, Second summer plumage.

A-D, Bi-colored bill, leg color and mantle color are good for this species.

A-D, I enclose two letters from Ken Brock relating to this bird possibly being a Lesser Black-backed Gull. The appearance of this bird in flight would have added several diagnostic features. The moral of the story is to complete viewing of a bird, including flushing it, before calling others. It is likely to stay around, but if not, so be it. I agree with Brock that a second-year California Gull is not expected (many stay near wintering grounds). I distrust size and mantle color to rule out Ring-billed Gull, but the white underparts and head do so, because Ring-billed Gull would have to be a first-year bird to match this bird's bill and tail.

A-D, Although age of bird is not discussed, description is adequate for 2nd year bird.

RE-VOTE (by mail Feb 1998): 7 A-D

A-D, second year. I previously voted NA because I felt that Herring Gull was not adequately eliminated. The documentation notes that Herring Gull was eliminated based on "size, dark eye, head and bill shape." I discounted these because size may have been difficult to judge without other Herrings Gulls present; the light eye of a Herring Gull may have appeared dark at a distance of 50 yards; and the head and bill shape of the bird were not described. I now realize that the light eye of a Herring Gull should have been clearly visible from that distance. The darker gray mantle also supports the distinction from Herring Gull. The bill pattern and "slightly darker gray mantle," as noted by Ken Brock, argue against Lesser Black-backed Gull. As noted by another committee member, the white underparts and head rule out first year Ring-billed Gull, and the bill and tail rule out older Ring-billed Gulls.

A-D, second year. Size, "dark eye", darker mantle than Ring-billeds all would argue for California vs. Herring Gull.

A-D, Brock saved me from typing! The bill is typical California. Also, we Midwesterners have a terrific time describing mantle color. With our frame of reference, California

would logically be described as slightly darker. Fuscus, even graellsii, looks incredibly darker to us, while on the coasts, where Great Black-backs or Westerns are common, the relative color is not so great. Just something to keep in mind as we evaluate gull records.

A-D, Tail pattern and bill-base/leg color would seem to preclude L. Black-backed Gull (flesh to yellowish/flesh to yellow). Iris should be paler. Herring Gull second-year has tail extensively whitish at base with dark sub-terminal band. Iris usually becoming pale. Mantle color usually similar to Ring-billed. Short-legged stocky appearance consistent with larger Cal. Gull on tarsi the same length as Ring-billed Gull (Grant/Dwight). Usually obvious light bill-tip with dusky sub-terminal area on Herring.

A-D, Slightly larger, heavier bodied, and shorter legged than Ring-billeds (subjective); mantle slightly darker gray than Ring-billed (subjective); bill larger than Ring-billed (how much??); legs dull gray with pinkish tinge; tail not described; underparts white (assumed from drawing). Any Herring Gull should be much larger and one with a gray mantle would be 2nd winter with brownish underparts or 3rd year with tailband obvious. A first-winter Ring-billed Gull could be similar, but I think tail band would be seen and underparts not white. I saw my first second-winter Lesser Black-backed Gull this year--the mantle was much darker as were the wings, and a prominent tail band was seen. Also the bill was much different (see Brock's letters). The drawing is helpful. A description of the upper tail and rump and upper wing would be helpful. The white underparts seem to exclude 1st year gulls that are anywhere similar to this bird. I worry more about Ring-billed Gull than Herring or Lesser Black-backed gulls.

A-D, No change from original vote.

97-40

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species How many? CALIFORNIA GULL - 1
 Location? GULL POINT, WEST LAKE OKOBOJI, DICKINSON CO.
 Type of habitat? ROCKY POINT ON NATURAL LAKE
 When? date(s): 9/7/97 Time: 12:50 PM - 1:20 PM
 Who? your name and address LEE A. SCHOENEWE
 518 W. 4th ST. SPENCER, IA 51301

Others with you NANCY SCHOENEWE

Others before and after you

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also describe voice and behavior. I SCANNED THE POINT AND NOTICED A CASPIAN TERN, SEVERAL FORSTER'S TERNS AND 50-60 RING-BILLED GULLS. ONE GULL ATTRACTED MY ATTENTION AS SLIGHTLY LARGER W/ A SLIGHTLY DARKER GRAY ON THE MANTLE, BUT DEFINITELY STILL AN IMMATURE GULL. I APPROACHED AT INTERVALS FROM APPROXIMATELY 200 YDS TO 50 YDS. THE BILL WAS LARGER THAN NEARBY RING-BILLED GULLS AND HAD A DARK TIP W/ DULL PINK-GRAY BASAL TWO-THIRDS. THE EYE WAS DARK. THE LEGS WERE A DULL GRAY W/ A PINKISH TINGE. THE BIRD WAS PREENING AND THE PRIMARIES AND TAIL WERE DARK BROWN. THE BODY WAS HEAVIER AND THE LEGS SHORTER THAN THE RING-BILLED.

Similar species and how eliminated:

RING-BILLED GULLS BY CLOSE COMPARISON; HERRING GULL - SIZE, DARK EYE, HEAD + BILL SHAPE

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: OVERCAST AFTERNOON; 50-200 YDS; 8X40 BINOCULARS
 20X-60X SCOPE

Previous experience with this species and similar ones:

References and persons consulted before writing description:

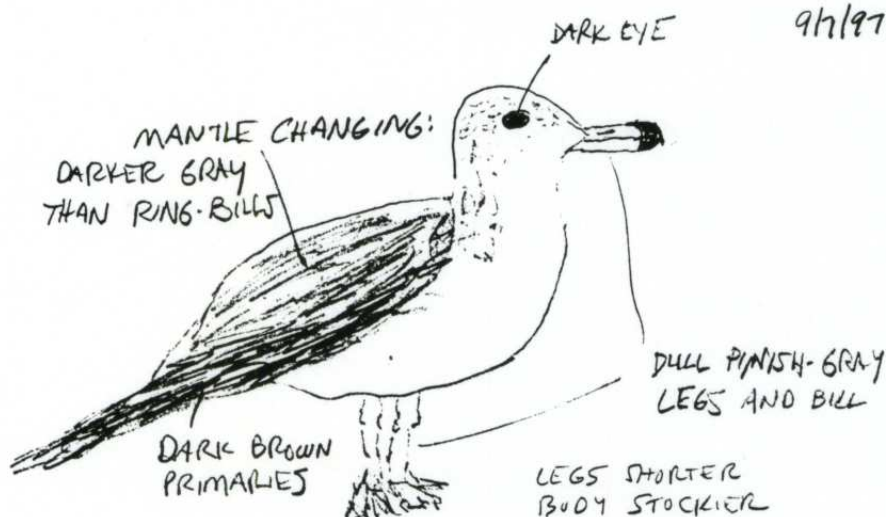
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FIELD GUIDE

How long before field notes made? IMMEDIATELY W/ SKETCH
 this form completed? 8 HOURS

Mail original form to field editor for this season.

I DID NOT SEE THE BIRD IN FLIGHT. I LEFT TO CALL ED THELEN AND WHEN I RETURNED, THE BIRD WAS GONE. I STAYED FOR ABOUT AN HOUR AND A HALF BUT THE BIRD DID NOT RETURN.

97-40



DOCUMENTATION FORM

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Type of habitat? ROCKY POINT ON NATURAL LAKE

When? date(s): 9/7/97 Time: 12:50 PM - 1:20 PM

Who? your name and address LEE A. SCHOENEWE

518 W. 4th ST. SPENCER, IA 51301

Others with you NANCY SCHOENEWE

Others before and after you

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also describe voice and behavior. I SCANNED THE POINT AND NOTICED A CASPIAN TERN, SEVERAL FORSTER'S TERNS AND 50-60 RING-BILLED GULLS. ONE GULL ATTRACTED MY ATTENTION AS SLIGHTLY LARGER W/ A SLIGHTLY DARKER GRAY ON THE MANTLE, BUT DEFINITELY STILL AN IMMATURE GULL. I APPROACHED AT INTERVALS FROM APPROXIMATELY 200 YDS TO 50 YDS. THE BILL WAS LARGER THAN NEARBY RING-BILLED GULLS AND HAD A DARK TIP W/ DULL PINK-GRAY BASAL TWO-THIRDS. THE EYE WAS DARK, THE LEGS WERE A DULL GRAY W/ A PINKISH TINGE. THE BIRD WAS PREENING AND THE PRIMARIES AND TAIL WERE DARK BROWN. THE BODY WAS HEAVIER AND THE LEGS SHORTER THAN THE RING-BILLED.

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Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: OVERCAST AFTERNOON: 50-200 YDS; 8X40 BINOCULARS

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
NORTHWEST



DIVISION OF
ARTS AND SCIENCES

97-40

22 January, 1998

Thomas Kent
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, IA 52246

Dear Tom,

Thanks for the excellent fall report; I wish all state compiler were as thorough and helpful as you. Sorry to be so slow in getting back to you, but these are not happy days in the ivy covered halls of academia.

You requested my comments on the California Gull (as you know I am generally suspicious of sub-adult *L. californicus* sightings). Based on the brown primaries and bill pattern this appears to be a second-year bird. Although this bird is likely a California Gull, I do not believe the write-up is adequate for a positive identification.

The only really useful mark is the "slightly darker gray mantle," which certainly suggests that is an interesting bird. I do not, however, believe that second-year Lesser Black-backed Gull is eliminated. Both *L. f. graellsii* and *L. californicus* are similar in size and there is considerable variation in the mantle color of Lesser Black-backed, with some appearing fairly pale.

Thus, the call boils down to an interpretation of "slightly darker gray mantle." In my opinion this is inadequate. I did not use this record in my report, but will be happy to include it later if the Iowa Committee approves.

Last Saturday (January 17) we had an incredible day in the field. Notable species, in order of their appearance, were: Snowy Owl, Pomarine Jaeger, Varied Thrush (stake out), King Eider, Red-throated Loon, Hoary Redpoll, and Greater Redpoll (large Com. Redpoll race). I still cannot believe we saw all these in one day, and in January. Wow!

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Kent".

3400 Broadway
Gary, Indiana
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219-980-6731
Fax: 219-980-6866



DIVISION OF
ARTS AND SCIENCES

97-40
26 January, 1998

Thomas Kent
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, IA 52246

Dear Tom,

I have reconsidered my assessment of Lee Schoenewe's California Gull. I believe I dismissed the bill pattern without adequate consideration. Despite the bill pattern of the second-year Lesser Black-backed shown in the NGFG and Grant's statement, "Bill usually extensively pale with blackish subterminal area,..." I have recently seen two second-year birds, plus several photos of second-year birds with almost entirely black bills.

Additionally, I also noted that the second-year bird you, Jim Fuller and others saw at Coralville Reservoir in October had a bill described as black with some flesh colored streaking on the distal two-thirds. Clearly, lots (most?) second-year Lesser Black-backed Gulls do not have anything approaching the classic "clean-cut" black-tipped Californian Gull bill pattern.

Thus, I now believe the typical California Gull bill pattern shown in Lee's drawing, which was ignored in my initial analysis, is indeed a strong mark in favor of *L. californicus*. This, in conjunction with the "slightly darker gray mantle," has convinced me the bird was not *L. f. graellsii*. Accordingly, I am reversing my earlier decision on this documentation and now believe Lee's bird was indeed a second-year California Gull.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tom Kent".

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